

(you) Need A Better Resurrection

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Genre: 98 Percent Gen Actually, Blink (several times) and You'll Miss It Implied Reddie, Child Abuse, Gen, Gen or Pre-Slash, Henry Bowers Redemption, M/M, Not-A-Psychopath Henry Bowers, Pennywise being Pennywise, Possibly (Probably) Slight OOC Bowers Gang, The Author is Self Indulgent, Totally Unnecessary Redemption Arc

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Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Henry Bowers, Mike Hanlon, Pennywise (IT), Reginald "Belch" Huggins, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris, Victor Criss

Relationships: Henry Bowers/Bill Denbrough, Implied Background Richie Tozier/Eddie Kaspbrak, Minor or Background Relationship(s)

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Summary:

In a world where Henry Bowers is less a genuine psychopath and more an abused and messed up kid being manipulated by an ancient evil, Bill Denbrough decides that against his better judgement, he's worth saving.

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Author's Note:

Notes: wild deviation from the book in terms of Henry's natural craziness. Movie Henry shows (slightly) more humanity than his book counterpart and I'm basing this on that representation of the character. Also, I think Nicholas Hamilton is the sweetest thing and I'm over here, against my better judgement, muttering "illogical redemption arc" to myself about Henry Bowers even if he absolutely doesn't deserve it. So. Jot that down. I know. I know he doesn't deserve a redemption and is NOT worth saving. He is a literal psychopath in canon. But this is happening anyway because I want it to. Also, be prepared for many, many references to his pretty blue eyes.

I'm gonna say he's about 16 in the movie, though we never get an exact age. I'm also going to say Bill is nearly 14, which puts them at about a two-two and a half year age gap. So... don't yell at me about their ages, is what I'm saying. This is mostly pre-slash anyway (heavy pre-slash but pre-slash nonetheless). Also: for the purposes of this fic, there's about a month in between the festival where the kids first talk about It and the projector scene. This is filled with bonding between the Seven and, in this fic, time to work some shit out with Henry.

It starts the day after the rock war.

It probably wouldn't have started at all if it had been more than Stan and Bill - the two with the least abrasive history with him - but as it stands it is Bill and Stan who see Henry Bowers limping as quickly as he can away from his father's property that day, with fear in his eyes and tears running down his face. His nose is bleeding, but he doesn't do a damn thing to stop it.

Bill's first reaction is to duck and hide behind a tree - but if Bowers looks their way there'll be no hiding Silver, or Stan's bike. Bowers doesn't look. He's just trying to get away.

Bill knows that this is something he shouldn't interfere with. Bowers is messed up, really - he's violent and racist and cruel. Bill knows all those things.

He also thinks of all his friends who run from their homes on a daily basis. His own parents don't give a shit about him, true, but Richie's mom is a drunk who says she wishes she'd never had him and Beverly's dad has hit her multiple times. Eddie's mom is so overprotective Bill is half convinced she's the cause of most of his anxiety issues.

And yet, for all of their parents' faults, none of his friends have ever had to run away limping and bleeding before. Bruised, maybe, but never afraid for their lives.

He is very quiet for a long while, trying to decide what to do, but then the silence is broken by a low, angry voice. The kind of voice more than capable of beating a kid black and blue.

“Get back here, you fuckin’ pansy ass! You little shit!”

He has never heard so much venom in one man's voice, and Bill's been on the receiving end of his son's.

Bowers visibly shakes and tries to move faster. His leg must really be messed up, because he can't manage much more speed.

“F-f-fuck,” Bill says. “Stan, we've gotta -“

Stan cuts him off, disbelieving. “We've gotta... what? Bill, if Bowers knows we've seen him like this he's going to come after us twice as hard!”

He's got a point, Bill can admit that, but he also can't just do nothing. “But maybe he doesn't. Maybe he'd be thankful for the help. Maybe we could find some c-common ground.”

“Or maybe he'll beat our faces in,” Stan whispers heatedly. “Or carve

his name into our stomachs the way he did Ben.”

“Okay, so he’s a dick. But if we don’t do anything, are we any b-b-better?”

“He’s not just a dick,” Stan says. “He’s a *psychopath*.”

“B-but he wasn’t,” Bill points out, squinting at Bowers’ slowly retreating figure. “He didn’t used to be this bad. M-m-maybe *this* is the reason it’s gotten worse.” It feels irrational, even to him, but he can’t just walk away.

Stan makes a face. “Can’t we just leave him be?”

Bill shakes his head, finally definitive. He’s made up his mind. “We at least gotta follow him - if he goes to one of his friends’ houses, then w-we know he’s safe, yeah? That he’s got a place to g-go to. But if not...”

He doesn’t know what he’ll do *if not* because taking him to his own house doesn’t sound like the greatest idea in the world, he’ll admit. It doesn’t mean he won’t do it, though, and he knows that.

“Fine,” Stan groans. “We follow him. But god, Bill, if I get my ass kicked because of this crazy idea of yours...”

So, at least agreed on that front, they follow him. It’s getting late, which concerns Bill - *he knows what happens in the dark in this town, he knows he knows he knows* - but he still follows distantly, trying to roll Silver along with him as quietly as possible. Stan grumbles behind him, but offers no real objections, which is good because Bill can’t be swayed on this.

He hopes that Bowers is leading them to Vic’s house, or Belch’s. He also hopes that it’s *not* Hockstetter’s house, because that kid is crazier than Bowers is and he doesn’t have the excuse of a shitty dad - but then he remembers the missing poster, and those thoughts die down with a vague sense of guilt.

Bowers doesn’t go to one of his friends’ houses, though. Instead, he leads them all the way to the park and finds a more or less secluded bench to sit on. Bill thinks, horrified, that he probably means to sleep

there.

Of course, that's when Bowers sees them.

At first, there's no recognition. There's only the blank face of a wounded, disassociating teenage boy: the same face he'd had on the day before, when they'd left him lying on the ground in the dirt. It had unsettled Bill then, too. He and Stan stand there awkwardly for a long minute while Bowers struggles to come back to himself. Eventually, the familiarity of their faces sets in, and Bowers' cheeks flush red in anger and humiliation. He sits up straighter, glaring at them.

"Get the fuck out of here, buh-buh-Bill," he snaps. The mock-stutter doesn't come out half as cruel as it usually does. Now it just seems like he's trying to piss them off quickly, so they'll go away. "And take your little Jewfag with you."

His desperation to get them to leave makes Bill a little reckless, a little less afraid of him. "D-don't call him that." Then, quieter as they approach, he says, "What's wrong with your leg? It l-l-looks like it hurts."

Bowers' face screws up. "Nothin's wrong with it. Now fuck off, before I kill both of you!"

He sounds menacing, but Bill doubts that he's ever been around someone when he's vulnerable like this because he's not good at hiding the pain he's in, or how scared he still is. There are fresh tears in his eyes.

Bill looks down at his leg and sees a new hole in his jeans that's positively soaked with blood. It looks like a knife wound, and Bill thinks of the switch blade he'd found by the Kissing Bridge that's laying buried in his desk drawer now. Bowers had to have gotten it from somewhere, and Bill would bet his dad has one, too.

His mouth starts moving before he gives it permission to. "That's gonna get infected. Come to my house. I'll help you c-clean it up."

Bowers looks at him as though he's either incredibly stupid or

amazing, Bill can't decipher which. "I don't need your help, stutters!" he snaps. "Now fuck off, okay?"

"No," Stan says at last. He looks pitying, like maybe he's starting to get why Bill couldn't leave him be. "Bill's right, that could totally get infected."

"W-we won't tell anyone," Bill says, reassuring. Bowers looks more and more confused about why they're there, and Bill is starting to be, too. "N-no one has to know."

Bowers sits there, looking furious and hurt and pathetic, for a couple minutes more. "If you tell anyone," he says lowly. "You're dead fucking meat."

"Why would we tell?" Stan groused. "This is just a sign neither of us have any self preservation skills."

But neither Bill nor Bowers are paying him any attention, because Bill is too busy rolling Silver over to him. "You can r-r-ride on the back, so you don't put weight on your leg," Bill tells him. "I used to do it all the time with E-Eddie."

Bowers' eyes go wide. "I'm not riding on the back of your piece of shit bike, Denbrough. What kind of sissy do I look like?"

"Do you want to walk four b-b-blocks to my house?" he asks, irritated. "B-because you can walk."

They have a stare down, but luckily for Bill Bowers doesn't look very menacing. He wins.

"I fucking hate you," Bowers spits, but his cheeks are still ruddy, so Bill thinks he's mostly just embarrassed. He would be too if he were in Bowers' position, discovered vulnerable by someone he usually towered over (at least metaphorically).

Bill gets on, and doesn't say anything about how Bowers has to put his hands on Bill's shoulders just to stay stable when he swings his bad leg over Bill's bike. They're surprisingly small hands, for a guy who uses them so violently. When he's on, with one hand fisted in Bill's shirt so he doesn't have to wrap his arms around Bill's waist,

they take off, Stan riding behind them.

Though Stan hadn't planned to stay the night, he calls and gets permission from his mom. She doesn't particularly care, and though Stan looks like he's not happy about it, he thanks her and follows Bill and Bowers upstairs. When Bill gives him a questioning look, he huffs. "I'm not going to leave you alone with a guy who has literally talked about killing us. Not a chance in the *world*."

"Fuck you," Bowers says, but Bill just rolls his eyes and shuffles him into the bathroom.

"Get your pants off," he says. "I've got shorts if you need them, but I g-gotta c-clean that wound." He slips out of the room and runs as quietly downstairs as he can to grab the first aid kit out of the downstairs bathroom. He takes it upstairs with him, breathing a sigh of relief when neither of his parents look away from the tv. They hadn't even noticed when he came in with Stan and Bowers in the first place.

Stan is standing awkwardly in the doorway. "I didn't want to watch him take his clothes off," he explains with a wrinkle of his nose. Bill just rolls his eyes again and walks through the open doorway. Bowers is quiet and has his arms wrapped around himself, his jeans folded on the toilet seat in spite of how dirty they are. Bill makes a mental note to put them in the washer when they're done with his leg.

Bowers is sitting on the edge of the tub in a pair of faded blue plaid boxers, facing the faucet with his right leg sitting in the tub. That's probably a good move, considering that it's still bleeding a little and needs to be washed pretty badly. There's blood all over his thigh. Before even saying anything to him, Bill roots around underneath the sink for a rag that isn't too lightly colored. He finds one that's a dark brown, decides it's fitting, and pulls it out.

"How d-deep d-d-does it go?" Bill asks when he passes it over to Bowers. He runs the faucet so that he can wet the rag, and begins to wash away the worst of the blood.

Bowers shrugs. "An inch or two, maybe. Not as deep as it could have gone."

He looks over at Bowers from where he's sat down on the closed toilet lid. "Has it gone deeper before?"

Bowers' blue eyes pierce him suddenly, just for a moment, before looking away. He doesn't answer.

Before Bill can say anything else, Stan slips around the corner of the doorway and comes in. He looks both hesitant and curious. "How much blood do you think you've lost?" he asks, and Bill suppresses the urge to groan aloud. Bowers has no such qualms and his more neutral expression turns back into a glare.

"Not too much to kick your ass," he snaps.

Strangely, Bill's first reaction is to snap back. "Don't be an asshole, dude. He d-didn't say it to be mean." Bowers turns his glare on Bill, but he keeps his face and voice carefully neutral. Bill tries to calm down, partially for his own sake and partially just to ease his stutter. "This is a n-no asshole zone. You be nice to us and we'll be nice to you."

"I don't need you to be nice to me," Bowers grumbles, but it's much more subdued.

"No, but we're already doing it," Stan snorts, and Bowers looks like he wants to argue but the thing is, it's true. "Look," Stan says, sighing. "It's shitty that this happened, and I know we're the last people you want to be spending time with, but maybe just... chill for a bit. We can resume the war in the morning."

Bill's kind of surprised that he doesn't actually have a complaint about anything Stan said, considering he's been contrary since this all started. "He's r-right," he agrees. "Can we call a truce? Even if it's j-just for tonight?"

Bowers grimaces, but after a long beat he nods and looks down pointedly at his leg. He rinses the rag, and runs it over the still slightly-pink skin. "Got any disinfectant?" he asks, voice back to being carefully neutral.

Bill hands it over. Part of him wants to wince when he sees how

automatic Bowers' movements are, as if he's done this time and time again, but the rest of him doesn't want to think about it. He feels... *weird* about the sympathy and concern he's starting to feel for Bowers. God knows the guy has never given him any reason to feel anything else but contempt for him, but this tense, defensive kid in his bathroom is just... broken.

Bowers examines his leg for a while, but eventually he just sighs and holds his hand out for the gauze. "Shouldn't need stitches," he says, as if he has experience deciding this. Bill chooses not to comment, and hands over the gauze and tape instead.

They watch his no-longer shaking hands wrap his leg up before finally Bowers swings his leg over the tub. "Well?" he asks.

Bill thinks for a second. "Stan," he says, turning to his friend. "T-take him to my room and set up my sleeping bag and extra pillow for him, okay?" He turns back to Bowers. "I'll throw your j-j-jeans in the wash, if that's alright with you." Bowers shrugs, and Bill nods definitively. Stan makes a face but indicates for Bowers to follow him. After a weird, half-blank but half-intense look at Bill, Bowers follows him.

He runs downstairs and tosses the ripped blue jeans in the washer. He puts it on the quickest setting, since there's only those in the barrel, and then slips back upstairs to find Stan and Bowers sitting awkwardly in his room. Stan's on the bed, trying hard not to stare, and Bowers is sitting cross legged on the floor, playing with a stray string on the sleeping bag.

"C-c-c-comfortable?" Bill manages to spit out, and Bowers nods without looking up. "It's not super late, so we c-could... do something?" He looks over at Stan, who shrugs. "I have a board game..."

Which is how they end up playing Monopoly with Henry Bowers. It goes smoothly enough, with Stan and Bowers across from each other and Bill in the middle. Bill doesn't blame Stan for not wanting to sit anywhere near the guy that's shoved him around for years, but he's also surprised by how little he minds it himself. When he sees how Bowers treats him tomorrow, he might revisit that, but for now he

really isn't that worried about having him around.

Stan gets awkward for a bit when Bill runs down to shift Bowers' jeans to the dryer, but Bill makes sure not to take too long. When he gets back, Stan has already begun to put away the game even though they weren't close to done, and Bowers is laying down, facing away from them.

"Can we just go to sleep?" Stan asks, bored. He sends a concerned glance over at Bowers, but he's not even paying attention to them. He's laying on his side, facing the wall.

"Yeah," he agrees easily, and he and Stan curl up in his bed. When Bill shuts the light off, they all lay there in silence until one-by-one, they slip into sleep.

In the morning, Bowers' sleeping bag is empty. It's clumsily folded, and Bill squints at it when his alarm goes off to wake him for school. He's forgotten to turn it off every morning since school ended.

"How long ago do you think he left?" he asks when Stan's awake, too.

"I literally don't care at all," Stan snorts. "I'm happy not to have to deal with him this morning." Bill can't say he doesn't agree, and he doesn't say anything else about it

They see him around town later that day and Bowers doesn't even look at them, but his jeans (pulled from Bill's dryer that morning) barely show the blood stains from the day before and he's not limping half as badly. His goons also follow his lead and ignore the Losers' Club entirely - so Bill counts it as a win.

Bill expects that to be the last of it, and so he and Stan never tell the others what happened. This comes to bite them in the ass when they wander into the Barrens two days later with all six of the others and find Henry Bowers, alone and bleeding from a split lip, sitting by the Kendusteaq. The water's rushing over the toes of his boots, but he

doesn't seem to care or even notice.

"Fuck off," he says without looking back at them, his voice a dead monotone, but Bill's already walking ahead. The others have stopped, leaving him to proceed alone. He can hear Stan groan.

"Is that the w-worst of it?" he asks, and Bowers' head snaps up. Immediately, Bowers groans much like Stan had. It would be funny if that split lip didn't look worse up close, and if there wasn't a strange kind of mania in his eyes. It almost makes Bill want to take a step back.

"Why the fuck are you here?" Bowers says, irritated, and then he glances over his shoulder further and sees the rest of them. "Fuck, fuck." He scrambles to his feet. "Why do you travel in a fucking pack?" His hands are shaking, but this time it's not from fear. Bill can't place what's going on with him, because this isn't the quiet, hurt kid he patched up a couple nights ago. There's something seriously wrong with him.

Bill scrambles up after him. "H-H-Henry! Calm down," he says, surprised by his own urge to calm him down. "N-no one's going to s-say anything or juh-judge you, okay. We just -"

When Bowers gets his fists in the collar of Bill's shirt, his eyes are huge and dangerous. He looks... *crazy*. That's all Bill can say. Bowers looks like he's two seconds away from shanking him, but there's something about it that's wrong on a deep, fundamental level. There's panic and something that doesn't seem very much like him at all behind his eyes. "Leave me alone, or I'll kill you," he hisses, and it's probably supposed to be menacing but instead it sounds desperate. "I'll fucking kill you, and you'll float."

Bill freezes, but Bowers doesn't notice. He's already too busy running away, even though he'd said that Bill was the one who needed to fuck off. The gears in Bill's head are turning, faster and faster.

You'll float.

He doesn't say so to any of the others, but he's starting to get a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach that he knows why Henry Bowers has

gotten meaner (*crazier*) since school ended.

“Um,” Richie begins, sounding dumbfounded. “What the fuck just happened? Bill?”

“Yeah,” Beverly echoes, bewildered. “What did you mean, the ‘worst of it?’ He could have *killed* you - I honestly thought he was going to hit you.” Bill can’t blame her for thinking so, because that’s pretty typical Bowers behavior, but he also can’t explain why he hadn’t thought it was even an option.

He’s struggling over whether or not he keeps Bowers’ shitty secret for him (like people don’t know his dad’s an abusive dick anyway) when Stan makes the choice for him.

“*Bill* here has decided that he’s going to be Henry Bowers’ savior,” he snarks, like Bill’s not doing a nice thing. Crazy, maybe, but nice. “We saw him running away from his dad the other day with a huge knife wound in his leg and Bill brought him to his house so he could fix him up.”

Eyebrows go up. “You brought that guy to your *house*?” Eddie asks, his voice rising an octave or two. “He knows where you *sleep*?”

“Q-quit shrieking,” Bill says with a wince. “And yeah, okay, I did. His dad was screaming at him and his leg was all *f-f-fucked up*, and I brought him back so he could have a roof over his head to sleep under. He was gonna sleep on a bench in the *park*. Why are you yelling at me about it?”

“We’re not mad at you for doing it,” Mike says slowly. “At least, I’m not mad. But I do think you’re out of your *mind* for doing it.”

“Seconded,” Eddie says immediately.

“Thirded,” Richie adds. No one else fourths, but he can tell they’re thinking it. “Bill, I love you. I really do. But it seems like you’re making a lot of bad decisions this summer, and not bad decisions like sticking your dick in the vacuum hose, okay - real bad decisions that’re gonna get someone hurt.”

“I hate that I agree with something Richie said that includes the

words *sticking your dick in the vacuum hose*,” Eddie begins, making a face. “But...”

“I agree wholeheartedly,” Stan says for him, and Eddie nods vehemently.

“L-l-l-look,” he says, clenching his fists. “I know it sounds nuts. But there’s something up with him. I have this f-f-feeling. If we ignore it something b-bad’s gonna happen.”

“Yeah,” Ben snorts. “You mean besides the bad stuff that’s gonna happen if we try to help him instead of running in the opposite direction when we see him? That bad stuff?”

Bev bites her lip. “I know it sounds mean, but Ben’s right. He’s awful, Bill. He’s racist, and he tried to carve his *name* into Ben’s stomach with that switchblade. He’s an awful person.”

“But he didn’t used to be this bad,” Bill points out. “He used to just shove us and c-c-call us names, right? Maybe hold us back and p-pretend he was going to hit us or whatever. It was just to pick on us. But he’s not doing that anymore - he’ll start normal, and then something will s-s-set him off and he’ll become totally different. He’s never tried to actually *hu-hurt* us before; he just wanted to scare us. He’s a f-fucking dick, but he’s not a murderer.”

“What are you saying?” Eddie asks, confused.

Bill takes a deep breath, and bites the words out as concisely as possible. “I think *It* is messing with him.” They’ve talked about the clown, a couple times - not anything concrete, but they’ve all agreed that they’ve seen things. Bad things.

“You meant the piece of shit clown you keep talking about?” Richie groans. “You think it’s got *Bowers*, too?”

“It’s real, Richie,” Mike says, frustrated and clearly uncomfortable. “You can pretend it doesn’t exist all you want but that doesn’t mean that the rest of us didn’t see it.” He turns to Bill. “Why do you think It’s got something to do with Bowers?”

“Because it ch-changes the people in Derry,” Bill answers. “Like, the

adults don't see stuff - they l-l-look away! Normally adults wouldn't l-look away, would they? But It can change your b-behavior. And all the weird stuff that's happened in t-town. The fire at the B-Black Spot. And the explosion at the Ironworks. It didn't start the f-fire, did It? But people d-did, because of It. Right?"

They're all very quiet for a long moment. "You think It's making Bowers crazy?" Mike asks.

"To get to *us*," Bill stresses, and he can see it the second it clicks on their faces - Mike first, and then Bev and Ben, then Eddie and Stan. Richie looks like he's still trying to deny it, even to himself, but Bill knows they understand. "It's trying to get to *us*, and it's using B-Bowers to d-do it."

"So your plan is to make friends with Bowers?" Bev asks, squinting at him. "Why not let It get him, if it's really trying to." There's a sound of agreement from Ben and Richie both.

Something ugly twists in Bill's gut. "Because I don't want more kids to go missing like Georgie even if they're monsters like him," he snaps. "And b-because his dad b-beats him even worse than your dad does you, Bev, and I'm n-not trying to be his *friend*, but I'm trying to make sure that he has somewhere to go when he's trying to get away from him." Bev isn't quite glaring at him, but she's clearly not happy about what he said. He won't apologize, but he does take a deep breath and calm down, to speak rationally. "And because if we let him g-go n-nuts because of It, then he's gonna come after *us*, which is what It *wants*. He's not g-gonna go crazy quietly."

"He's gonna go out with a bang," Mike says, a realization, and Bill nods.

"But he's a *dick*," Stan says, frustrated. "I get what you're saying, but why not let It eat him and just watch our own backs until It does? You can't save everyone, Bill! And I don't really think he's worth saving! And honestly, if his dad hits him sometimes, he *deserves* it." Beverly's jaw clenches and she looks away.

Bill's fists clench. "First of all, have you ever considered that he's a *dick* because his dad is the way he is? That maybe if we help him get

out of there sometimes, he can still t-t-turn around a little bit? I'm not saying he'll suddenly become a good guy but..." He shrugs and continues. "And second, if we say It can just go ahead and eat every a-asshole in this town we might as well not try to st-t-top It at all. Everyone around here is an asshole."

"Whoa," Eddie says. "I don't remember volunteering to try and stop It! I did not volunteer to go near It ever again." He sounds like he's picking a fight, but Bill's been his friend long enough to hear the very real layer of fear underneath the irritation.

"No one else is going to," Beverly whispers. They all look at her, and she looks scared, too, but her eyes are defiant. "No one else is going to stop It and It's *killing* people. I don't want to go anywhere near it again, either, but... I was so scared in the bathroom that day. I heard the voices of all those dead kids. If we *can* stop it from killing more people... shouldn't we?"

Richie makes a sound like he's about to cry. "All my friends are literally insane," he says mournfully.

Bill, Richie, and Eddie run into Bowers in Keene's store the next day. He's not alone - he's quiet and staring off into the distance, the way he's been doing so much more often as of late, but he's flanked by Belch and Vic.

The others automatically make to walk around them by going down another aisle, although what they need is at the end of the aisle Bowers is in and there's plenty of room. A week and a half ago, Bill would have done the same thing.

Today, he walks straight toward them. He doesn't go out of his way to make eye contact, but he's making a point: he and Bowers don't have to be at odds. It gets him shoved against the shelves, but it's Belch who does it.

He makes a mistake when he looks up - he looks at Bowers directly. And then, even when he should - he can't look away. It's so stupid, but there's a kind of vulnerability in Bowers' eyes that surprises him

into maintaining the eye contact. Bowers looks almost flustered the longer he stares, until finally, Belch shoves him against the shelves again.

“Wha’chu want, st-st-stutters,” Belch mocks, but Bill barely looks his way.

“Got something to say?” Bowers says, harsh, but there’s something nervous in his expression. *Of course*, he thinks after a second. With all the eye contact, he probably thought Bill was making a different statement. A threat, maybe - a memory flashes to the front of his mind of Bowers only being relaxed by Bill promising he wouldn’t tell anyone about what happened.

“N-nothing,” Bill says, making it a point to be genuine but not afraid, and Bowers swallows. Message received. *I won’t tell anyone*.

“Then get the fuck out of here,” Bowers says, and lets Belch give him one more shove before he drags his friends away.

On the other end of the aisle, where his friends are awkwardly standing and watching everything unfold, there’s a commotion as they all shift and straighten up.

“That’s the least hostile he’s ever been in his life,” Richie says. “Literally ever.”

“He didn’t even spit on you,” Ben says in awe.

Bill grabs what they came in for. “I think we’re coming to an understanding,” he says thoughtfully, and leaves it at that.

It only takes two more days for Bill to be riding his bike home from the library to rent a vhs copy of Raiders of the Lost Ark to see Bowers walking alone with his arms tightly crossed and his head down. He actually has to stop for a minute to think long and hard about what he wants to do here, because the boys are already waiting for him so they can have a sleepover at his house.

If he brings Bowers back, he’s running the risk of upsetting all of

them - but mostly Ben and Mike, who have dealt with a lot of violence at his hands. Maybe they agreed that helping Bowers when his dad was getting violent was a good idea, but that didn't mean they wanted to spend time with the guy. God, Bill doesn't even really want to spend time with the guy, and he's the one who wants to help him, though his reasons *are* partially selfish.

In the end, he can't let Bowers walk away, because he's walking towards the park again. *The idiot*. Vic and Belch are obviously pretty loyal - but his stupid pride won't let him go to them for help, even though he looks like he's about to drop dead. There are bags under his eyes and his walk isn't quite steady.

He turns his bike around, wheeling it across the street until he pulls up next to Bowers. When he meets Bill's eyes, his own are red rimmed. "Why the fuck are you always around?" he asks tiredly, but he's not even putting up a pretense of hostility. His lip is split again, though it hadn't had the chance to heal in the first place.

"Bad luck," he says, half snark and half genuine resignation about it. "Come on." Bowers huffs a frustrated breath of air. He's not acting anything like he had the day in the Barrens, which only cements Bill's belief that he's being manipulated by It.

"I'm not your pet project, stutters."

"No, but I'm not going to let you sleep in the p-park," he retorts. "It's supposed to r-rain tonight."

Bowers looks uncomfortable. "It wouldn't be the first time." But Bill just looks at him. He doesn't say anything, and after a lengthy eye-contact conversation, Bowers huffs again.

"We're having a group sleepover at mine," Bill says very slowly. "You're g-gonna c-come, and you're not gonna start a fight. You can sleep and maybe get some f-f-food, and then in the morning you can go, and none of us will say anything to anyone about it."

His expression leaves very little room for argument, or so he thinks, judging by the pinched look on Bowers' face. "Fine, okay? But if any of your shitty friends say anything, I swear I'll ruin 'em." Bill shrugs.

“Especially that little n-” Jesus *Christ*, this guy.

“D-d-don’t call him that,” Bill interrupts, voice harder than he thought it could be. He sounds something like his own dad, he thinks – a dad trying to keep Henry in line. It’s ridiculous, considering that not a month ago he’d gone running at the sight of him. “Remember the r-r-rule.”

“I don’t see why you’re getting pissy about it,” he argues. “He *is*. He’s just a dirty black kid.”

Bill feels simmering anger underneath his skin, but speaks as evenly as he can. “There’s nothing d-d-d-dirty about M-Mike,” he says, voice hard. “He’s like any one of us - it’s j-just that his skin’s a different color. He’s not dumb, or mean, or anything. There’s no reason to hate him just ‘cause he’s black.”

Henry doesn’t look angry at his words, but there’s something approaching confusion in his eyes. Something uncomfortable. “My dad says -”

“Your dad isn’t exactly a paragon of human decency,” Bill says dryly, and when Bowers’ eyes heat up again, Bill pushes forward before he can complain. “Can you really defend him? After he k-keeps h-hurting you?”

Bowers looks away, frowning deeply.

“You know you don’t have to be a d-d-dick because he *is*, right?” Bill says, squinting at him a little bit. “Clearly he doesn’t l-like you any better because you’ve followed in his shitty f-f-footsteps.” Bowers’ shoulders are climbing up towards his ears defensively, as if he wants to defend his dad, but also wants to agree with Bill. Bill entertains the idea that he’s also feeling a little personally attacked right now, and softens. “Maybe it’s time you start thinking about things your way, and n-not his,” Bill finishes quietly.

“Maybe I *do* agree with him,” Bowers grumbles, but it’s clearly because he doesn’t know what else to say that’s not a betrayal or overly revealing.

Bill huffs a little himself. “Then keep it to your - *your* -” He pauses, the word stuck, clears his throat, and continues. “Keep it to yourself. Don’t call Mike that, and don’t call anyone *f-flamers*, and don’t -”

“*Fine*,” Bowers agrees. Bill suspects it’s mostly to shut him up, but he also think it might be because Bill had been staring him down again.

Bill’s quickly realizing that eye contact is an easy way to make Bowers antsy - which is kind of a shame, he thinks absently, without even acknowledging the thought. Bowers has nice eyes. “You walking?” he asks. “Or riding?”

Bowers glares at Silver like it’s offended him, but eventually he just shuffles around and throws a leg over her back tire and settles in with his hand fisted in Bill’s flannel like before. Bill takes off - slow to start, as Silver always is, but once she picks up speed they fly through the streets. It’s the most exhilarating feeling in the world, Bill thinks - nothing can beat it. Bowers is warm against his back, but Bill can almost pretend he’s someone else. Eddie, or Stan.

He takes several minutes when they get there trying to figure out how to break this one to the guys. He’s fully expecting at least one of them to throw something at his head - his money is on Richie - and another to leave. He sighs, pulls himself together, and leads Bowers through the front door.

He pauses in the entry to the living room. Both of his parents are sitting on the couch, one on each end, staring numbly at the TV. He swallows. “Hi, Dad,” he calls. It comes out kind of a croak. “Hi, Mom.”

His mother hums, but doesn’t look away. His father doesn’t even acknowledge him. It makes his stomach hurt, but he just ducks his head and goes upstairs, trusting Bowers to follow. Thankfully, he doesn’t say anything about what just happened.

“Stay here,” he says when Bowers follows him into the upstairs hallway. He shrugs and looks at the wall of old family photographs. Bill figures he’s safe enough in the hall, and slips into his room, only cracking the door enough to get through so they don’t see Bowers and freak out.

He stands there, blocking the doorway, and looks at his assembled friends. Richie and Eddie are on the floor propped up against the bed, where Stan is laying on his stomach and reading a book. Mike and Ben are sitting cross legged across from Richie and Eddie, a game of Yahtzee in between them.

Stan looks up when he enters. Bill's uncertain expression registers and causes Stan's to go flat. "You didn't," Stan says. He winces, and Stan rolls his eyes to the heavens. Richie raises an eyebrow at him.

"Didn't what?" he asks, and then Mike slowly turns around to give Bill a *look*.

"You *didn't*," he says, mirroring Stan's tone.

"Didn't *what*?"

"Shut up, Richie," Eddie mutters, elbowing him, but a second later it seems to click for him as well. He looks up at Bill in horror. "You *didn't*!"

"It's going to rain," he says weakly, and from the bed, Stan groans. His face is buried in Bill's pillow.

"You expect me to sleep in the same room as that guy?" Mike says incredulously. "He is going to shank me in my *sleep*, Bill. What the hell." Ben nods vehemently, eyes huge and alarmed.

"Bowers?" Richie asks, eyes widening. "What the hell, Bill? Did you bring Bowers here?" Bill sometimes wonders how such a smart guy can also be such a spaz - that had taken entirely too long.

"Look," he says in a low voice. "He's f-f-fucked up. And he won't bother anyone - I already t-talked t-to him about it. He'll probably ignore all of us and go to sleep."

"If I die tonight, I'm haunting the fuck out of you," Richie says flatly.

"Beep beep," he replies shortly. "Just d-don't antagonize him. Okay? We have an agreement - we play nice with him, he plays nice with us."

They all make faces, but none of them object. Stan, as if this is all old news, is already back to reading his book. Bill turns and opens the door. "Come on, d-dude."

Bowers is very quiet when he does come in, sticking pretty close to Bill and keeping his face neutral. It's a very dead-eyed expression - much like the one he'd had after the first time Bill'd brought him here. It makes him sad and a little uncomfortable, like he's watching Bowers wither up inside right in front of him.

"You just want to go to sleep?" he asks, and Bowers shrugs. Since he's not getting any help from him, he sets aside the vhs he'd brought and goes about pulling out the extra sleeping bag. He turns his bedside and desk lamps on so that he can turn off the overhead light.

"Nice of you to join us," Richie calls, half-snark and half-anxious word vomit. Bowers glares at him for half a second, but then Bill grabs him by the arm and pulls him over to where he's set up a pretty comfortable looking sleeping nook in the corner.

He doesn't realize until he's let go that he'd actually just dared to grab Bowers and pull him somewhere - that he's put his hands on Bowers' bare skin and lived to tell the tale. It makes him relax a little, because Bowers doesn't look angry about it. Just out of his depth. "We'll t-try and stay quiet, okay?" he assures him. Bowers looks at him, his blue eyes huge and fathomless. There's something sparking in there, like genuine gratitude, that gives Bill hope.

True to his word, he makes sure the others keep it to a dull roar after Bowers takes his boots off and slips into the sleeping bag. He probably doesn't have to keep such a close eye on the noise level, because Bowers drops off pretty much immediately and doesn't seem to stir no matter what happens. Still, he promised, and by the time they're all ready to join him, they've finished two board games at near-whispers. No one says a word about not being able to watch the movie Bill'd checked out.

Bill knows they're not happy with him, but nobody dies in the night and he considers it another success.

In the morning, Bowers wakes up last of them all. It's a Saturday morning, so Bill figures he doesn't have anywhere to be, and he lets the guy sleep because he'd looked like he needed it. After they've all gotten hungry, there's a hushed debate about whether they should leave him or wake him up, but everyone nose-goes until Bill's left in the room alone. Bill examines him for a minute after the others run down to raid the fridge for breakfast.

He's thin, despite his muscles, and Bill's pretty sure he's worn those same jeans four times this week. His hair curls at the back, where it's longer, and one socked foot pokes out from the sleeping bag. He's got scars on his arm, though faint, and he can see more marks on his back where his shirt's ridden up. There's a nasty bruise on his hip.

After he's looked for maybe too long, he pads up to the sleeping nook and kneels down. He reaches out hesitantly, but eventually he gets the balls to place a palm on Bowers' upper arm and jostle him as gently as he can while still actually waking him.

Groggy blue eyes slit open. "What'cha want?" he growls - or, it would be a growl if he didn't sound like he was about to yawn the entire time.

"Wanna come find b-b-breakfast with us?" he asks. "You can sleep some more if you want, but I figured I promised you f-food, so..."

Bowers, alarmingly, looks for a split second as if he might cry. And then the expression is gone again, as if it never came. He still takes a minute to rub the sleep (and emotion) from his eyes.

"I could do with some food," he agrees, begrudging, and Bill just nods before standing up and backing away so Bowers can climb out of the sleeping bag and stand. Before they leave the room, however, Bill stops him.

"I just wanna *s-say*," he starts, awkward but determined. "You can come here, if you need someplace to crash. Even if I don't find you first. You can just... come here. I didn't want to say it in front of the g-guys, but I wanted you to know."

Bowers shifts. "Whatever," he says dismissively, though it's a little *too*

casual. “Food?”

So Bill leads him downstairs. Bowers shuffles a little as he walks, and he’s rubbing his eyes when they enter the natural light of the kitchen. The assembled Losers quiet a little when they walk in, but no one gets hostile.

“You don’t have any food,” Richie says plaintively to Bill. Bill can’t remember the last time anyone in the house went grocery shopping, and winces. “There’s not a single Eggo in this house. Can you believe that?” It seems like everyone is resolving to ignore Bowers, who has padded over to the fridge and is rifling around like he owns it. After a minute, he makes a weird face and then starts opening cabinets like he’s looking for something. “I mean, who doesn’t even have a fucking Eggo? We’re growing boys, Big Bill!” He looks imploringly his way. “We need Eggos. Many more Eggos than you currently have, which is zero.”

“I d-don’t know what to tell you, unless you want us to g-go to your house for breakfast,” Bill tells him, and Richie looks like he’s seriously considering it - at least, until Bowers speaks.

“If you tell anyone this happened, you’re in for a world of hurt,” he says casually from the cabinet. There’s baking powder and flour in his hands. “But I’m fucking starved. If I make pancakes, will you shut the fuck up about Eggos?”

Richie gapes at him. After a long pause, he nods. Bowers nods back, and then starts pulling things out. They all watch, dumbfounded, as he starts mixing things together.

“Hey, Billy-boy,” Bowers says after he’s got some stuff in a bowl. Bill genuinely can’t tell what the stuff is - he knows a lot of flour went into it, and that’s about it. “Where’s your beaters?”

He pads over to the cabinets and pulls out the mixer, handing it to Bowers, who nods at him in thanks.

Within half an hour, there’s a huge stack of pancakes still growing on a serving plate next to the stove, where Bowers is finishing up. He turns the burner off, pushes the pan to the back, and then he turns to

the rest of them and squints. “Are you gonna fucking eat, or are you gonna stare at it?” he says defensively, and Bill is the first to scramble over, though he can hear most of the others standing from the kitchen table, chairs scraping back.

“Th-thanks, Henry,” he says tentatively, testing the name out on his tongue, and Henry just looks at him. Their eyes meet, but in the end, he only nods and gestures toward the platter of pancakes.

One by one, they get their food.

“Thanks, Bowers,” Richie says, his fear all but gone in the face of fluffy pancakes. “Shit, these look good!”

“Thanks,” Stan mutters half-resentfully, but he’s eyeing the pancakes too.

Once they’re all seated, having thanked Henry and caused him to look around awkwardly to avoid meeting their gazes, the mood cheers.

Over the course of breakfast, the sound level grows until they’re all chattering as always. Henry doesn’t say a lot, but Bill catches him smirking a little at their banter, and he smiles to himself about it, feeling accomplished. The boys disperse soon after - Stan, Mike, and Ben wandering in the direction of the quarry while Eddie and Richie wander off somewhere in the opposite direction - and leave Henry and Bill to clean up. Surprisingly, Henry doesn’t complain about having to wash dishes; he just does it and lets his hands move methodically over the plates before handing them to Bill for him to dry.

“W-where’d you learn to c-cook?” he asks, hesitantly making conversation. “I can’t cook much of anything.”

Henry glances over at him, expression mild. Bill thinks he’s seen Henry calm and nonaggressive more than anyone else has in a long time. “My ma left when I was small,” he says, and Bill stills, his hands pausing over the plate in his hand. “Because....” He sighs. “Because of my dad. She was sick of him hurtin’ her, so she left. Left me with him, too. Anyway, Dad doesn’t cook, so I learned early that

if I was hungry, I'd better figure it the fuck out."

Bill struggles over whether he should say sorry, or something like that. In the end, he just says, "Well, you're good at it." Henry shrugs. Bill shuffles his feet a little, but Henry just hands him the last handful of silverware and stands there, leaning against the counter, while he dries and puts them away. "Do you w-wanna w-watch a movie or something?" he asks, trying to sound casual and probably failing. "You don't have to g-g-go home if you don't want to yet."

To be fair, Henry looks as though he's seriously considering it, but then his eyes dim. "If I stay out any longer Dad'll be angrier than if I go home now," he says dully. "He's used to me staying out all night but he'll expect me back during the day to work around the house."

Bill nods and doesn't say anything.

"I'm gonna go get my boots," Henry tells him, and Bill lets him go upstairs without following. When he comes back downstairs, he looks... meaner, like he's put his anger back on in preparation for going home. "Thanks for the food, Stutters," he throws out. Bill doesn't bother getting mad about it, and Henry's jaw clenches at the lack of reaction - but Bill thinks that it might be because Bill's disregard for his cruelty only reminds him that it's unnecessary.

Bill opens his mouth to say goodbye, but Henry's apparently had enough of playing nice - he storms out, leaving Bill with one hand up to wave awkwardly.

"Al-r-r-right then," he sighs, and goes about his day.

That night, his unlocked window is shoved open. Bill sits up in bed, rubbing his eyes, and watches as Henry Bowers shoves a leg into his room, and then another. He slips through, and Bill greets him quietly - but Henry doesn't appear to hear him.

Bill reaches over to turn his bedside lamp on, and when the light floods the room, he sees that Henry's face is streaked with tears, and twisted as if he's still midst-sob. Bill swings his legs out of bed, ready to go forward and do *something*, though he doesn't know what - but

then he sees the almost yellowish glint in his blue eyes. It doesn't make sense - it's just a sense of amber, really, though the physicality of his eyes is still crystal blue, but Bill knows what it is. He's seen it before - seen it in Henry's eyes, even: the mania from that day by the Kendustaug.

"Everything's your fault," Henry says gutturally. He makes a sound that's not quite a sob, but might as well be. "You keep confusing me, and you... you keep acting like I'm helpless, but I'm not! I'm not helpless. I'm gonna kill you, and I'm gonna kill *him* -"

Bill has no doubt that the *him* is Henry's dad, and he opens his mouth to ask what happened - but then, Henry's on him. He pushes Bill back onto the bed with his hand around Bill's vulnerable throat.

"I'm gonna kill you for this," he says, stressing the word *kill*. "I'm gonna - gonna teach you to throw stones -"

"Henry, stop!" he gasps around Henry's hand, and the more he speaks the more the crazed look in his eyes grows.

IT, his mind screams at him.

"I'm not scared of you!" he screams to the clown lurking in Henry's mind. "*And I'm not scared of him. Leave us both alone!*"

Henry's fist tightens, as if instinctually - but then, he's genuinely sobbing, his blueblueblue eyes wide and clear and terrified. As if burned, he yanks himself away and lets Bill go. For several long moments, they just stay like that, breathing hard.

"I keep hearing this voice," Henry croaks. He sounds very fragile for such a hostile person. "It keeps telling me I should kill people. I think I'm going crazy."

His head hangs. Bill wants to be angry or scared out of habit, but he *knows*. This wasn't Henry - Henry the bully who had never actually tried to kill him before a monster got into his head. Henry the bully who gave him a "free pass" after his brother went missing even though he's never given any of them a free pass for anything. A bad kid, a trouble kid, maybe, but also a troubled kid, and a hurt one.

“You're n-n-ot,” Bill says finally. His voice sounds hoarse and it makes Henry shake. “I mean... maybe you're naturally a little c-crazy, but even I noticed that you didn't used to actually hurt people outside of beating them up a little, not until this suh-summer. That's cause it's n-n-not you - it's the monster that's trying to get to us.”

Henry looks up, confused. “Wait, what?” His eyebrows are furrowed.

Bill sits up properly, looking at him with a tired expression. “There's a m-m-monster in Derry. All of my friends have seen it, and me - It's what's been taking kids. It t-t-took my b-brother.” He meets Henry's eyes hesitantly. “I kn-know it sounds crazy, but I've seen It. You've n-noticed there's something wrong here, haven't you? There's something wrong with the *t-t-town*.”

“You're saying... the voice...” Henry sounds dumbfounded.

“It's kind of gritty, right? But still ch-childish. And underneath that it sounds like something that's just n-n-not human.” It's a struggle to find a way to describe it that isn't just *bad-wrong*, and isn't sure how well he succeeds until the realization dawns in Henry's eyes.

“You're being serious. Fuck, that's exactly what it sounds like,” Henry says. Then, the wetness of almost-tears becomes more pronounced in his voice. “I'm not crazy? It's just... that thing? I'm really not losing my mind?”

Bill nods, and then Henry shudders, head still hung.

“C-come on,” Bill says, because he doesn't know what else to do. “I'll explain in the morning. Just get some s-sleep.” He reaches over and pulls Henry towards the bed. Henry takes his boots off and yanks his shirt over his head before climbing in without protest. He buries his head in a pillow and falls asleep almost instantly as Bill just watches, the whole moment feeling surreal.

Eventually, Bill pulls his comforter over the both of them and settles back in to sleep himself.

The morning finds them sitting across the kitchen table facing each

other. There's a cup of his mom's coffee in Henry's hands.

"It showed you your brother?" Henry's asking in stark disbelief. In the light of day, Bill can understand how it would seem more outlandish than it had in the dark after experiencing Its influence.

Bill just nods, spooning cereal into his mouth. After he swallows, he explains properly. "For each of us, it shows up as s-s-something different. For Bev, it's blood. It was a l-leper for Eddie, because his mom has him scared stiff of diseases. Stan saw this woman with a messed up face from this painting his dad has. It depends on what scares us most. Usually it's a c-c-clown."

"But I'm not seeing anything," Henry says, his eyebrows furrowed. "It's just... It's telling me to do things, and It makes me angry. I don't feel like I'm in control of myself." Then, his cheeks pink a little. "I mean, it's not like I *like* any of you, but I don't really want to go to prison for murder, either."

Bill ignores that last sentence. "You're older than we are - and I know that d-doesn't really matter, usually, because it took H-Hockstetter, but you're less vulnerable to fear, I think. So instead of t-trying to scare you... I think it's trying to use you against us, instead. It's targeting us, through you."

Henry's eyes darken. "I don't like the idea of anybody trying to use me. Monster or not."

Bill shrugs. "I don't like it ei-either. That's why I told you about It." He leans in, imploring. "Look, we're all gonna get together for a little research in a couple days. We have maps of the town and we're gonna try to get some f-f-facts together. You should join us - this affects you t-too, right?"

It takes a minute, but finally Henry sighs. "Either I get to laugh at you or I find out there's actually a monster clown eating people in town. Sure, why the fuck not."

They sit in silence for a little while, but eventually they go back up to Bill's room and play cards for lack of something better to do. Henry clearly doesn't want to go back home, and so he's killing time until

he meets up with Vic and Belch around noon. They have a surprisingly companionable time until Henry gets up to go.

Bill makes him pause before he leaves Bill's room. He doesn't explain at first - instead, he roots around in one of the drawers of his desk until he finds the switchblade he'd found by the Kissing Bridge weeks ago.

He holds it out, hesitant but determined. "I found this out by the B-Barrens. It's yours, isn't it?"

Henry just looks at it for a long time, and then he reaches out just as hesitantly and takes it. "I never found it," he says. "Thought it was gone forever." Then, his eyes narrow. "How long have you had it?"

Bill cracks a smile. "A w-while. You used it to cut Ben, so I'm not sorry I kept it for so long. But we've got a t-truce now, so I figured... you might want it back." In spite of himself, Henry grins, too, ever so slightly. "Just... maybe don't use it on people anymore?"

"No promises," he says casually, and then laughs when Bill makes what's probably a constipated face at him. "Nah. I never... I never really thought I'd ever actually hurt any of you like that, not that bad. Not until I started going crazy this summer. So, assuming we can deal with whatever this monster is - assuming there is a monster and I'm not just losing my mind... yeah, I can probably agree not to use it on any of you losers."

"W-watch it, Bowers," Bill tells him dryly. "You're on your way to being a l-l-loser yourself, hanging with us." Henry rolls his eyes, but there's a boyish grin on his face that Bill's not sure he's ever seen before.

"As if. Later, loser."

"L-later, loser," Bill says, half-mimicking, and then with a little whistle, Henry walks out and is gone.

Bill knows that their pleasant days are coming down to a close. He can feel it in his bones. It's with that frame of mind that he

encourages the rest of the Losers' Club to join him at the quarry the next day. He could use another day of fun before everything inevitably goes to shit, as it always does in Derry.

They're all only too aware of their plans for the future, and none of them are excited to learn more about the clown, let alone try to figure out where It is, which Bill is determined to do. Nonetheless, by the time they've been swimming for an hour or so, they've managed to put it out of their minds long enough to have a little fun.

They're in the middle of another water battle, with Bev on Ben's shoulders and Bill on Mike's, when they hear a hollering from the cliff.

"Hey, losers!" It's Henry, flanked by Vic and Belch. All three are standing on the edge of the cliff in their boxers. Bill can't make out their expressions from the water, but Henry's voice is non aggressive. "Clear out! We wanna swim!"

Bill sees the others starting to get angry out of the corner of his eye, and hears a huff of irritation, but before anyone can say anything, Bill hollers back, "This quarry's b-big enough for the b-both of us, asshole!"

He hears Henry give a full belly laugh. Beside him, Belch begins to make angry noises, but Henry doesn't join in.

"You asked for it!" Henry yells, and then leaps off the edge. He lands with a whoop into the water.

"Why are you trying to get us killed?" Eddie asks him despairingly, but Bill just throws himself backwards off Mike's shoulders and swims out to where Henry's getting his bearings in the water. "Why are you trying to get yourself killed?" Eddie calls after him, groaning.

Bill hears Eddie's worried noises, and he probably has a good reason for them, because when Bill's in range he throws himself onto Henry's back.

"You're going down, fucker," Henry announces, spluttering, when he comes back up, and he yanks Bill around so that he can shove him

under the water. He vaguely hears the panicked yelling of his friends when he comes back up, but then they realize he's *come back up*. Bill shifts himself on top of Henry to shove him under, and ignores the sound of splashes as Vic and Belch join everyone in the water.

They wrestle for what feels like ages, breathless with laughter, but eventually Bill grins at him and says, "T-truce?" Henry rolls his eyes.

"You and your *truces*. Fine - but only because I think a fish got into my ear last time you dunked me," he says, then adds smugly, "and because I was going easy on you anyway." Bill rolls his eyes, but then Henry casually calls over his shoulder, "We're calling a truce, boys!"

Belch makes a confused sound, but Vic grins at Henry, albeit hesitantly. Still looking at him over his shoulder, Henry smiles, too, and Vic's half-grin melts into a beam, clearly pleased by Henry's good mood.

After their impromptu wrestling match, they more or less stick to their individual friend groups, but Bill feels good about the fact that there aren't really any lines in the sand drawn between them. Henry, Vic, and Belch all swim lazily in the deeper waters, while Bill and the other Losers play stupid games in the shallows. Though Ben, Stan, and Eddie especially had been stiff and concerned at first (and Mike wary), they all eventually thaw until they're ignoring the other boys entirely.

They keep to themselves, at least until a shrieking sound comes from the other end of the quarry, where Henry is laughing hysterically, more openly than they've ever heard him laugh before.

Belch isn't laughing - in fact his whole face is bright red in pain - but Vic is as he coaxes a turtle off Belch's finger.

"Did Belch just -?" Bill begins, but Bev cuts him off with a snort.

"Bowers held it out to him," she explains dryly. "He probably hoped Belch would do what he did, but I can't even judge Bowers for it because Belch literally just stuck his finger into the turtle's face." She rolls her eyes. "Are all boys like that?"

Bill thinks about it. “Kinda, yeah.”

Richie comes up next to them, Eddie casually riding piggyback. “Could be worse,” he says cheerfully. “At least they just played with it a little, let it bite Belch, and let it go. Patrick Hockstetter would have killed it for fun - and that’s *not* normal boy behavior.” He makes a face and Beverly grimaces.

“Everyone knew there was something not right about Hockstetter,” Stan says, joining them. There’s a grimace of his own on his face.

“I don’t want to say I’m glad he’s gone, but...” Eddie trails off.

“I am,” Stan snorts. “Haven’t you noticed that they’ve been less evil since he disappeared? Bowers is still borderline homicidal, but as a whole I’d say the evil levels have gone down... twenty percent?”

“Bowers has been getting better since he went missing, though,” Bev says, and Bill nods vehemently.

Stan, surprising them both, snorts. “No, Bowers has been getting better since Bill decided he wanted to play savior.” They all quiet, looking over at him. “I don’t think he’s even been this openly cheerful in years. Maybe you were right, Bill. Helping him might... *actually* be a good thing.” He sounds a little displeased by it, but Bill will take what he can get.

They watch Henry and his friend splash around for several moments more. Bill thinks Stan’s probably right. He doesn’t think he’s ever seen Henry actually having fun.

“Y-yeah,” Bill says. “I think it is.”

Henry shows up early a day later, with Vic and Belch in tow.

Bill tenses - he hadn’t expected Henry to bring the other two with him. As if reacting to Bill’s apprehension, Vic smiles awkwardly. Henry steps forward into the garage without hesitation, though his friends halt near the entrance.

“If there’s some nasty thing killing kids in town, I want my friends to know about it, too. It already took Patrick,” Henry tells him. The explanation make sense, and Bill forces himself to relax.

“It’s not necessarily k-killing them,” Bill says, determined. “It’s just t-taking them. They’re just m-missing.”

Part of him expects Henry to deny him that, to laugh at his hope, but his expression softens instead. It’s not quite pity, but it’s sad. Almost knowing. “I hope you’re right,” is all he says. “Anyway. You know more about this shit than I do. Explain it to Vic and Belch.” Bill would take offense to being ordered about, but Henry’s right; he does have the best grasp on what’s happening.

He gives Vic and Belch a cliffnotes version of the Derry history relevant to what’s going on, and then connects it to the disappearances. “It shows up every twenty-seven years, and then a bunch of people d-d-die. Every twenty-seven years, without fail. That’s not a c-coincidence,” he tells them earnestly. It’s obvious they don’t buy it, though Vic looks more distrustful than openly calling bullshit.

“Dude, do you really believe this shit?” Belch asks Henry, who’s leaning against Bill’s dad’s work table. “There’s a shape changing monster in Derry eating kids? Really?”

Henry clenches his jaw. There’s something that’s almost *hurt* about his expression. “It’s either that, or I’m losing my mind. I’ve *heard* it. It’s made me... do shit. I don’t think It’s bullshit - I think It’s real. Or at least somewhat real - I don’t know for sure, and that’s why we’re here.”

Belch opens his mouth to argue, but then Vic speaks up, soft spoken but firm. “I wanna stay and hear this, too. Because you haven’t been yourself, Henry. If this is why, then...” He shrugs, and there’s stark relief in Henry’s eyes.

You haven’t been yourself.

I’m really not losing my mind?

Bill realizes all at once that Henry really doesn't want to be the person he's been becoming, and the realization causes such a surge of hope to well in his chest he has to actively control his expression to keep it off his face.

"I think it's been using Henry to get to us. That's why he's been so off the r-rails lately. I don't think it's just him," Bill agrees.

"Is that why we're making friends with the losers?" Belch asks skeptically.

When Henry responds, it's in a no-nonsense tone. "That's why we're working together," he corrects, and Bill tries to push down the hurt and disappointment that tells Bill he's started to like Henry more than he meant to. "We're making *friends*," Henry continues then, and Bill's head snaps up. "... because I said so. There's plenty of other losers to fuck with; we can play nice with these ones."

"Tozier's kind of funny," Vic offers up, and Henry snorts, thawing.

"If that's what you've gotta tell yourself to play nice, do it."

"But don't say it to his f-face," Bill chimes in, trying to keep the grin off his face. "He'll make even more jokes and n-nobody wants that." Henry snickers.

They relax for a while, because the others aren't expected for another hour, and when Belch goes outside for a smoke, Henry wanders after him, leaving Vic and Bill in the garage. They're very quiet for a while, before Vic breaks the silence with a sigh.

"I guess I should thank you," he says, mild-mannered as always. For a guy with such a mean sneer and who thinks it's funny to make younger kids cry, he's a pretty quiet dude. "Even if this clown shit isn't real - even if some monster isn't making him hurt people, Henry thinks it is, and it's... good for him. To not think he's genuinely a bad person, like his dad. To have some hope for himself."

Bill has never thought of that connection, and his heart clenches in his chest. "It really d-does exist. It's taking advantage of him already being messed up by stuff, and It's using him to attack us. Or It was,

until..." He trails off, remembering he promised not to tell about the specifics. "Until I tried to help him."

Vic looks over at him. His expression is solemn. "You mean with his dad, right? It's taking advantage of how messed up he is because of his dad."

Bill deflates. "That guy is gonna kill him one day," he says softly. "I'm trying to help, but you can only do so much. He lives there. He goes back to him every night."

Vic nods. "You're the one who bandaged his leg a couple weeks ago, aren't you? Normally he steals bandages from the nurse at school, but school was already out."

"He did the bandaging," Bill admits. "But I brought him here, yeah."

"He won't ever say so, but he's probably really grateful for that," Vic tells him. Then he sighs again. "He hates being weak in front of us, like he thinks he's always gotta be cool and in charge. He'll run off instead of asking us for a place to stay. Too much pride. Belch and I do want to help - he's been our friend since we were kids, you know? But he won't let us. We don't know how to make him, either."

"Why are you telling me this?" Bill asks hesitantly. This is the most he's heard Vic speak literally ever, and he doesn't know what to do with it.

Vic shrugs. "Because he's starting to have fun again. He has somewhere to go when he's hurt, even if he won't come to us. He *trusts* you, and I don't get how because he hated your guts a month ago, but he does. So I wanted you to know that it matters, because you're literally changing his life. No one except me and Belch have ever tried to help him, and the fact that you are means something."

Bill nods, musing over that. He wonders if it was just Henry's bad luck that they lived in Derry, because if *no one* had ever tried to help him... shouldn't someone have seen the signs? Shouldn't someone have tried to help? In a normal town, maybe they would have, but the adults in Derry tend to look the other way. Always.

“W-when he was younger, when you first became f-friends. Was he like this then?” he asks, curious. “Did he laugh and play around and stuff? Cause for the last year, he’s seemed like he’s just m-mean, all the time. Even to you guys. The only time he laughs is when he’s beating people up.”

Vic hums thoughtfully. “He hasn’t been *all* bad lately, but... yeah. He did used to be a lot more fun, that’s for sure. This summer especially, all he’s wanted to do was hang out looking for someone to hurt, but we used to just hang out for fun. Did you know that he used to be really funny? In spite of his dad and everything, he used to make a lot of jokes, and he liked to pull pranks. Fun ones, not... not the stuff he’s done to you guys.”

“When did he start to change?” Bill asks, and Vic frowns.

“I mean, he’s been getting more serious for like three years now. I don’t blame him; his dad gets worse every year, like Henry getting older means he can take more of a beating. But even though he was more serious, it wasn’t until last year that he started acting weird - like he wasn’t always with us mentally even if he was physically, you know? He’d zone out, like he was listening to something that wasn’t there. I thought maybe he *was* losing his mind, especially when he just started snapping whenever we would fuck with one of you.” Vic looks uncomfortable talking about it - more uncomfortable than he had been when Bill had explained about It. Maybe because he’s realizing there’s some truth to what Bill’s saying.

“What do you mean, he’d s-s-snap?” Bill presses. Vic shifts on the seat he’s commandeered for himself, his shoulders tense.

“What do you think I mean, buh-buh-Bill?” Vic sneers, probably because he doesn’t want to talk about it (or admit to it), but Bill’s unimpressed look makes him wince. “Fine, sorry. I just mean that it’d be like he’d flip a switch and suddenly he wouldn’t be messing around anymore. Dude, Denbrough - shit. I thought he was gonna kill your fat friend, the new kid? Henry’s joked about using his knife on one of you before - and maybe he would have done like a tiny little cut, just to scare you, but the second he got close to that kid, he went *nuts*. Henry wouldn’t ever have cut him like that before this summer.”

Bill frowns. He takes a minute to process, and then says slowly, “His name’s B-Ben. Don’t call him s-shit like that.”

“Ben, sure,” he says, raising his hands in a defensive pose. He makes a face but otherwise doesn’t complain. “That’s not the point. The point is that normally Henry wouldn’t have done it, okay. We like being the top of the food chain but we don’t want to be *murderers*, like real criminals. We never meant to actually hurt someone, not bad.”

“Patrick would have,” Bill says. It comes out sour, and he hadn’t really meant to say it at all - but Vic doesn’t look upset. He just winces again.

“Well, Patrick was crazy,” he says as if it’s common knowledge. “He’d never have said it, but I’m pretty sure we were just like toys to him - me and Belch, anyway. He’d act like we were barely people. He’s probably part of why Henry’s gotten worse the last couple years.” He rolls his eyes, but then he quiets, remembering. He looks slightly ashamed of himself for talking shit, considering what happened to him. “I mean, I hope he’s okay and not dead, I guess. I’m just saying that’s different. *He’s* different; we’re not like that.”

Bill shrugs. “Didn’t say you w-w-were. I’m just saying... you’ve gotta watch the company you keep, is all.”

Vic makes a face and looks away. “Right,” he says. “Right, right.”

They’re quiet for a bit, and when Henry and Belch walk back in, Vic gets up to go talk to Belch, passing Henry on the way. Bill pulls out the current map of Derry, and when Henry comes closer, he says, “We’re gonna get a p-projector from the library.” He smooths the map out on the work table. “Ben’s got these projector s-slide copies of the old map, and we’re gonna overlap them, to see if we can find a p-pattern.”

Henry nods. “Saw two of your friends coming with the projector. They should be here in a minute or so. Want me to tack this map up while you help them mess with it?”

Bill hands him the map. “Yeah, th-thanks.” Henry hums in reply and

sets about taping up the thin paper. While he does, Bill goes to meet the two friends at the garage door. It turns out to be Mike and Ben, and Bill welcomes them in. He thinks it says a lot that they don't flinch or startle when they see Henry's gang.

"You told them?" Mike asks quietly, eyebrows raised.

"I told Henry, 'cause I thought he n-needed to know, and he told them, 'cause he thought *they* n-needed to know." Bill shrugs.

"Hey, if it helps stop more kids from going missing," Mike says with a shrug of his own. "The more people in the know the better, right?"

"Or we just send It after more people 'cause now they're a threat," Ben says glumly, and Bill winces - he hadn't thought of that.

They start setting up - mostly Mike, who actually seems to know what he's doing with it. Bill isn't surprised; as it turns out, Mike has an even bigger historian streak than Ben, thanks to his grandfather, and he's spent enough time in the library himself. As he fiddles, Bev shows up with Richie, both of them hovering by the door to finish cigarettes. Behind them, obviously avoiding the cigarette smoke, are Stan and Eddie. At the sight of Vic's blonde head in the garage, Stan leans over to Eddie, who listens for a moment and then visibly groans. He doesn't say anything about it when he walks into the garage, but his crossed arms show his thoughts plainly enough.

"I still don't know what you think we're gonna find," Richie tells him once his cigarette is put out. He takes a seat behind where Eddie has sat down next to the projector, on one of the many old buckets and chairs lying around. "I thought we stopped believing in the boogieman at age six."

"Shut up, Richie," Bev sighs.

"Yeah," Eddie says. "Beep beep. It's real. I'm telling you; I saw it."

"Instead of arguing about it, can we just look at the damn maps?" Henry says, vaguely irritated but still clearly himself. He doesn't look like he's anywhere near the simmering anger that had been underneath his skin a week ago.

“Yeah,” Ben agrees, surprising everyone. “We should look at the maps. What’re all those circled spots, Bill?”

Bill closes the garage door and goes to stand by Mike. Henry moves to stand with Vic and Belch at the back. Mike turns the projector on.

“L-look,” he says quietly, pointing. “That’s where G-G-G-*Georgie* disappeared. There’s the Ironworks, and the Black Spot. Everywhere It happens, it’s... it’s all connected by the Sewers. And they all meet up at -”

“The well house,” Ben interrupts, eyes wide.

“It’s in the house on Neibolt Street,” Stan says softly, and in front of them, Eddie shoves his inhaler in his mouth. His shoulders are tense and his hands are shaking. The mood takes a much darker turn as they all realize that Stan’s right.

“You meant that creepy ass house where all the junkies and hobos like to sleep?” Richie sounds unimpressed, but underneath it there’s a threat of discomfort.

Bev frowns, running a hand through her hair. “I hate that place. It always feel like it’s watching me.”

“Yeah, me too,” Vic says from behind them, and he’s grimacing when Bill turns to glance at him.

“That’s where I saw it,” Eddie says in a low voice, just a hint of a wheeze lingering. “That’s where I saw the clown.”

Bill’s chest is tight. “Th-th-that’s where It lives,” he concludes, a plan already swirling through his head.

“I can’t imagine anything ever wanting to live there,” Stan says, voice shaky, and Bill wholeheartedly agrees.

Startling them, Eddie launches to his feet. “Can we stop talking about this?” he says, as if he’s forcing it out. His eyes are huge and scared. He moves in front of the projector. “I can barely breathe - this is summer, we’re kids - *I can barely breathe* and I’m about to have a motherfucking asthma attack!” Richie stands, as if to comfort him,

but then Eddie spins to face the map and yells, “*I’m not doing this!*” He rips the map down.

Bill steps forward, frustrated. “What the hell! Put the map b-back!”

Eddie shakes his head resolutely. “Uh-uh.” But as he says it, the projector clicks to a new slide. And then another - a picture of Bill and his family. Georgie’s smiling face haunts him from the image.

“What’s happening?” he asks shakily, looking down at the projector, still clicking through photos he *knows* he hadn’t loaded into it. “What’s going on?”

“Guys?” Mike says, his voice thin and scared. “Guys -”

But Bill’s looked back at the photos. He doesn’t think he can look away. “Georgie,” he chokes. Behind him, Henry’s got a hand on his arm. He’s saying Bill’s name in a low voice, but Bill can barely hear him.

“Bill?” Stan says, too, but the pictures are flipping faster and faster, over one picture until it’s zooming in on the obscured face of his mother - *the obscured face of the clown* -

“What the fuck,” Richie starts, horrified.

“Is that...” Belch begins to ask, startled, from the back.

“That’s It,” Bill answers, voice gaining strength as anger and fear fill him in equal measure. *That’s the bastard that took my brother.* Henry’s shaking him now, trying to pull him away from the rapidly clicking projector.

“What *THE FUCK IS THAT* - *WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT?*” Richie’s shrieking, and Eddie’s shrieking too, though Bill can’t look at either of them. He can’t look away from the projector slides, still flipping, still showing the clown’s face more and more clearly. He knows distantly that there’s a lot of noise, but he can’t look away even though everyone’s *screaming* -

Henry pulls him backwards by force. His eyes are huge and terrified, but even though he’d pulled Bill back to where the rest of them are

huddling, he's not looking away from the projector, either. "Turn it off!" he's yelling, still holding onto Bill's arm.

Beverly echoes him, the noise growing and growing until Mike finally launches his foot forward. The projector clatters to the ground, and for once the darkness is a relief. Bill instinctually reaches up to grab at Henry's shirt, his heart pounding in his throat.

But then it flickers. A blurry image of the clown projects over the wall, and Richie shrieks again. It flickers off, then, and back on. Stan slowly moves away from that wall, toward the garage door, in horror.

It flickers off. When it turns on again, the blurry clown is gone - but he's not. He's there, huge and real as he crawls out of the projector image. Stan screams, jumping back, and he drags Richie with him by his shirt sleeve. Henry's got an arm around Bill's chest and is pulling him backwards, his breath coming hot and fast in his ear as he mutters *fuck* over and over again.

The clown has gone from clown to *demonic monstrosity* in two seconds flat, and Bill clutches at Henry like a lifeline. Its gold eyes glow like hellfire. Bill swears there's blood on its sharp teeth.

What happens next is a blur. Henry lets go of him at some point, and the clown zeroes in on Beverly - probably because she's shaking and vulnerable, standing apart from the rest of them. "Bev!" Bill doesn't know if it's himself or someone else screaming her name - it's probably all of them, over and over again - but he doesn't care to figure it out. All he's aware of is that It's getting closer to Bev now, It's huge jaws opening, and that the garage door won't open even though he's standing behind Mike and Ben as they try desperately to shove it upward.

He knows that Henry let go of him when they all started scrambling to get the garage door open, but when the door finally flies up, he doesn't expect to see Henry standing in front of Bev with his arms braced on either side of her head and his eyes shut tight. His muscular back is one long, tight line of tension, shielding her from where long teeth and a huge hand had been closing in.

As the garage floods with light, he takes a moment - probably to calm

his beating heart, and then pulls away. The clown is gone, and Henry double and triple checks over his shoulder to be sure. When he is, he turns back to Beverly.

“You okay?” he asks Bev gruffly as they all watch, stupefied. Even Vic, the most staunch supporter of Henry’s humanity, looks surprised. Shaken, Bev nods.

She’s trembling as she says, “Thank you... Henry.” She looks over at them. “Thanks,” she says to Mike and Ben, and then she throws her arms around Bill’s neck. He hugs her tight, and breathes a sigh of relief that she’s okay - and that Henry was there.

“It saw us,” Eddie manages, and Bev lets go of Bill so he can face the others. “It saw us and it knows where we are.” Eddie takes a huge puff from his inhaler, Richie’s body a stiff line next to him.

“It always did,” Bill says, fists clenched, and he steps out of the garage to look at them. “So let’s go.”

Ben laughs a little, hysterically. “Go? Go where?”

Henry’s face says he knows exactly where Bill is thinking, but Bill says it anyway. “Neibolt - that’s where G-Georgie is.”

“You’re insane,” Henry says, groaning, and next to him Belch’s pale face nods quickly.

“After that?” Stan adds, his voice high and thin.

“Yeah, it’s summer.” Richie looks and sounds lost. His hand is still holding onto the side of Eddie’s shirt so tightly his knuckles are white. “We should be outside...”

Bill’s expression twists. “Say it’s summer one m-more f-f-f-fucking time,” he snaps. But he doesn’t wait for anyone to. He turns, and grabs for Silver.

“What the fuck are you doing, Denbrough?” Vic asks, alarmed. He, Henry, and Bev all step forward.

“Bill, don’t you fucking dare,” Henry says, coming forward to stop

him - but he's already on his bike and headed toward the street.

“Bill,” Bev calls desperately. “*Wait!*” But he's gone.

He's barely got his hand on the doorknob of Neibolt house by the time the others catch up. Bev is riding with Mike, and Eddie with Richie - because Belch has Eddie's bike and Henry and Vic are on Bev's. Vic looks like he's about to be sick, but he's following anyway without hesitation. It's Stan who looks like he's about to cut and run.

“Bill,” Bev says, her brow furrowed and her lower lip wobbling. “Bill, you can't go in there! This is crazy!”

His jaw clenches and he turns around. “Look. You don't have to go in with me, but what happens when another Georgie goes missing? Or another Betty, or another Ed Corcoran? Or... one of us? Are you just gonna pretend it isn't happening like everyone else in this town? Because I can't. I go home, and all I see is that Georgie isn't there. His clothes, his toys - his *stupid* stuffed animals, but he isn't. So walking into this house... for me, is easier than walking into my own.”

He's *right*, and their faces tell him he knows it, so he turns around and braces himself to go inside.

“Wow,” Richie says quietly.

Ben makes a confused sound. “What?”

It's Henry that replies, cutting Richie off. “He didn't stutter.” He sounds... grudgingly impressed.

“*Wait!*” Stan interrupts nervously. “Shouldn't we have some people keep watch?” he continues when Bill turns around again. “Just in case... something bad happens?”

Bill frowns, because he sees the logic in that, too. “Who wants to stay out here?” he asks. Almost every hand goes up - even Belch and Vic, who hadn't even believed him an hour ago. The only two who don't volunteer are Bev and Henry. Henry in particular looks almost ill, but his expression is sure.

Eventually, the Losers all pick blades of grass in place of straws to see who loses. The two shortest belong to Eddie and Richie, who finally groan and agree to go in while everyone else stays outside. A few feet away, Bill hears Henry talking to Vic and Belch.

“Just stay out here, okay? I’m going in with them, but you guys gotta stay out here and make sure nothing happens to the ones staying behind.”

“So we’re guard dogs now?” Belch asks, squinting at him. Henry rolls his eyes.

“No, but we’re the oldest. We’ve got to protect ‘em. I go in with them, and you guys stay out here and watch over these four. Okay?”

Belch opens his mouth to argue, but Vic nods and cuts him off. “We’ll do it, Henry. Don’t worry about it.” Henry puts a hand on his shoulder and nods before slipping away to join Bill, Richie, and Eddie.

“We throw him to the clown first, right?” Richie asks weakly, jerking a thumb in Henry’s direction. To his credit, Henry just rolls his eyes. “Can’t believe I drew the short straw,” he grumbles as they step inside, ducking under the boards nailed in front of the door. “You guys should feel lucky we weren’t measuring dicks.”

“Shut up, Richie” Henry and Eddie groan at the same time. Bill would chuckle about it if they weren’t in the creepiest place on earth. Richie mutters to himself, but Bill is too busy looking around at the house. It really is the kind of place a monster like It would live - it’s cobwebbed and blackened, though there’s no fire damage or anything to have caused it.

Bill hates it so much, already. Even with three friends behind him, he doesn’t feel safe - and the feeling gets worse after Richie finds that missing poster with his face.

“This place is fucking with us,” Henry says in a low voice once they manage to calm Richie down. He’s still shaky and uncertain, and while Bill talks to Henry, Richie moves to Eddie’s side and lets Eddie run comforting hands over his arms. “It’s gonna keep fucking with us,

Denbrough - are you really sure this is a good idea? You're gonna get us all fucking killed."

"I've gotta find my b-brother," he whispers back, frustrated. "I have to. I never said you had to come with us."

Henry sighs, but before he can reply, they hear sobbing from upstairs. Richie and Eddie look over at them with huge eyes and terrified expressions.

"Hello?"

Bill's pretty sure his heart is gonna stop in his chest. "Hello?"

There's another sob. "Help me, please?"

Henry curses, but Bill's already leading them all upstairs, unable to think about anything except getting to where Betty Ripsom is pleading for their help. The house is so much bigger on the inside and surprisingly intact - looking at it from the yard gives the impression that it's about to crumble, but the floor underneath their feet is stable if decrepit.

Upstairs, Bill peers down a hallway. Richie and Eddie are right behind him, Henry following them up like he's protecting them. It makes Bill feel, even minutely, better.

"Betty?" Bill says. She's laying on her stomach, her hands scrabbling at the floor in front of her - and then she looks at him, her face grimy with tears and dirt.

"Ripsom?" Richie chokes, and then Betty disappears with a shriek, dragged backwards into the room where they can no longer see her. Bill moves forward almost immediately, and he only vaguely hears Henry grumble and quickly follow after them as Bill leads him and Richie into the room. He's looking around, trying to find where Betty could have possibly been dragged off to -

But then the door is shut and Eddie is on the other side. "Fuck, Denbrough," Henry snarls, yanking on the door. At one point, he kicks it, growling when it doesn't budge. "Shit, this nightmare house - what the hell?" He's very pale and scared - Bill doesn't think he's ever

seen Henry scared before. Henry looks around, and groans. “Fuck, where’s four eyes?”

Bill barely has time to start running for the doorway Richie’s disappeared through before the door shuts. He yanks at the doorknob, increasingly desperate, and behind him Henry’s still trying to get the hall door open. “Forget that! Help me get Richie out of there!” he snaps, and with a gust of a breath, Henry comes over and tries to help him get the door open.

“Richie!” he yells, but all he can hear is Richie’s screaming and Henry’s grunts of effort as he rattles the doorknob. “G-get back,” Bill orders and the second Henry’s out of the firing range he shoves his foot into the door as hard as possible. It opens with a rush of splinters and there’s barely enough time to grab Richie and shut the door again in the clown’s face. “Let’s get out of here.” He sounds desperate, and wishes he could pull himself together - at least for Richie’s sake. But he can’t.

As it turns out, it doesn’t matter, because the filthy mattress in the adjoined room starts shaking, and Eddie’s head rips through the fabric. Bill can’t move, but it’s Richie who’s shaking. At the sight of Eddie’s face - pale as death and filthy - he makes a terrible sound.

“Wanna play loogie?”

Bill doesn’t think he’ll ever forget the sight of acidic black vomit pouring from Eddie’s mouth. He’s dead, Bill thinks wildly. *He’s dead. That’s why It’s showing us this, it’s because he’s dead and it’s my fault* - Henry grabs his shoulder and Richie’s both, pulling them backward.

“It’s more shitty tricks,” Henry tells them firmly. His voice is shaking, but he sounds like he believes it. “Come on, you fucking idiots - I know you’re both dumb as shit, but don’t let it get to you like this. We’ve gotta go.”

Bill swallows and nods, but when they turn around, there’s three doors. Painted on each are the words *very scary, scary, and not scary at all*. They look like they’ve been painted in blood - blood that’s dripping upward instead of down. They trade a glance, and Henry drags them toward the *not scary at all* door. It takes a minute to steel

his nerves, but then he opens it. Bill thinks for a long minute that they picked the wrong door - it opens to blackness, and Bill is looking over Henry's shoulder when he hears "where's my shoe?" asked in a soft voice.

He reaches out around Henry, who's shaking as he stares into the darkness, and pulls at the chain he can barely see.

Betty starts screaming almost as soon as they do - the second they realize her entire bottom half is just *gone*.

"Where the *fuck* were her legs?" Richie shrieks, his voice raising in pitch.

Between him and Henry, they manage to wrestle Richie into staying still. "It isn't real," Bill says, firm, desperate to make Richie believe it. "Remember the missing kid poster? That wasn't real, so - so this isn't real." Richie nods, awkwardly, and Bill says, "Come on, are you ready?"

"*No*," Richie says, but Henry is pushing them toward the door again, pale faced.

"Get the fucking door *open*," he spits, and Bill does. It opens to the same hallway they entered through, and Bill breathes half a sigh of relief.

"Thank fuck," Richie says.

"Where's E-Eddie?" Bill asks, as if either Richie or Henry would know, but then he hears Eddie screaming from downstairs and he's moving before he can even think about it.

"Fuck, Bill," Henry says, voice tight. "Quit running *off*!" But he's running, too, chasing Bill down the stairs. Richie isn't saying anything - in fact, he's outrunning Bill now that he has the momentum.

"Eddie!" he screams, voice cracking. As if in reply, Eddie screams again, though the sound is muffled. They skid into what used to be the kitchen, only to freeze in place.

There's a name for what Bill feels when he sees the monster kneeling over his friend, and it's *terror*. He's beyond fear; he feels so scared he's sick with it. Slowly, as if preparing for a dramatic entrance, the clown faces him.

"This isn't real enough for you, Billy?" the clown says in Its squeaking mockery of the tone adults used with children. Behind him, Eddie's chest heaves, one of his arms cradled in the other and bent at a horrible angle. "I'm not real enough for you?" Its mouth curves into a grin that's equal parts monstrous and smug. "*It was real enough for Georgie.*"

Henry takes his arm the second it's said, clamping down with enough force to bruise, but even if Bill *had* been planning to launch himself at the creature in anger, It comes at *him* first.

He thinks, for one long second, that he's about to die - that they're all about to die, and it'll be because of him. Because he can't leave ghosts alone.

He thrusts his fists against the post and still insists he sees the gh-gh-gh-gh

-

Beverly comes out of nowhere with what looks like a rusty post from the fence, its sharp end going directly through Its right eye. Ben, Mike, and Stan all filter in, too, and gape in horror at the monster that's groaning as It tries to process the damage that's just been done to It. Behind them, Vic and Belch stand in the doorway, but they're not even moving now. They're just staring, faces tight and pale in fear.

It struggles after that, but weakly, and after slicing Its claws shallowly across Ben's stomach, It retreats. Bill watches it go, twitching and sick at the thought of coming here to find his brother and leaving with nothing.

Henry follows him when he follows It out. "We can't let it get away," he mutters, then again to himself.

"Fuck, Bill, stop," Henry hisses, but he still follows Bill until they're both standing on the stairs to the cellar, watching It descend into the

well. “Oh, *fuck*,” he says weakly, and then he puts a shaking hand on Bill’s shoulder, trying to pull him back upstairs.

“It’s in the sewers,” Bill tells him, on the verge of tears. “We can’t let it go. We’ve got to -”

“Not now, Bill,” Henry says, and suddenly there’s a bone-weary exhaustion in his voice. “Not now. Your friends are hurt and George isn’t here, okay? We can’t... not now. Sometimes you’ve gotta pick your battles.”

Henry’s eyes are impossibly huge, imploring him to listen. He rubs his face to get rid of any tears and deflates. With a relieved sigh, Henry leads him by the arm back up into the dim light of the kitchen. Eddie is clutching his broken arm and lined with tension, and next to him, Richie is hanging his head and holding onto Eddie’s sleeve. The rest of them are just trembling.

With It gone, they all go back out onto the street - Eddie and Richie as quickly as possible, though Eddie is steadfastly refusing to speak even though Richie’s begging him in a low voice to say if he’s okay or not. Vic and Belch wait for Henry and Bill, who make up the tail end of the group.

“Is It dead?” Vic asks, his voice a whisper.

Bill shakes his head. He’s still processing, frankly, and is thankful for the hand that’s moved from his arm to his back, pressing against it and urging him forward. A huge part of him wants to follow It down, follow It until he finds his brother and *ends this*.

But Henry’s right. They can’t now, not together, and going alone will only get him killed.

Dread curling in his stomach, Bill follows everyone as they take Eddie home.

At the end of the night, Bill’s alone in his room, starting at the wall across from his bed. He feels... numb. God, he doesn’t even know if he has friends anymore - Eddie was whisked away by his mother, and

he'd *punched* Richie... the only people still there by the time he finally dragged himself home were Beverly and Henry. Henry's friends didn't seem to be against him, but after seeing the rows and rows of razor-like teeth, Bill couldn't blame either Belch or Vic if they were.

He keeps doing this, he thinks - he sent Georgie out alone because he was sick, and that got Georgie *ki-taken*. It got Georgie taken. Then, he dragged everyone to Neibolt and nearly got Eddie killed.

Richie's right. This is on him, and he has to accept it.

Henry shows up regularly over the next couple weeks, though no one else does. There's something funny about that, because Bill has never once imagined he'd be able to say that Henry Bowers is his only friend. He knows logically that a fight doesn't mean the end of their friendships, but Eddie won't answer his phone calls. Stan slammed the door in his face when he tried to visit and Ben is mysteriously out of the house whenever he calls. Richie spends all day at the arcade and the one time Bill tried to talk to him he'd said *fuck off*, *Denbrough* without even looking away from the screen, then ignored him until he eventually left.

Beverly isn't angry at him, like the others, but she's also not around, either. She hasn't even been leaving the house much - Bill wonders if it's because of her dad, but mostly he thinks it's probably because he fucked everything up. He wouldn't blame her for being just as done with him as the others. After all, she's the one that'd had to save their asses - and then Eddie's mother had called her a *dirty girl* like the rumors about her were all that mattered. She doesn't deserve to be scrutinized and lied about like that.

The point is, only Henry, Vic, and Belch have stuck around, and thank god they have, because Bill's pretty sure that they'd all have gone nuts by now otherwise. It's mostly Henry that Bill sees regularly - Vic and Belch join them often, but Bill never hangs out with either of them one-on-one. In spite of that, he's really starting to like them. Bill misses *his* friends (though Vic and Belch are quickly joining Henry on that list), but this is okay. It's good, even, when he manages

to forget that everyone else hates him.

The day everything goes to shit again, Bill is at Henry's house - a place he'd never thought he'd be hanging out. As it turns out so long as Henry's dad isn't there it's okay. Better than sitting around his house, only too aware that his parents barely know he's there.

Bill's watching as Henry hits targets with his dad's gun. He knows that Henry shouldn't have it, but his mind is also (very quietly) reminding him that this is good. Practice with a weapon is good: they might need it. He doesn't say it aloud; he's afraid of the backlash he'd get for thinking about going into the house again, or into the sewers. To distract himself from those thoughts, he focuses on Henry again.

Henry manages to hit all of the bottles that Belch had set up, and off to the side, Belch and Vic both look impressed. "Dude, you're good at that," Belch calls, and Henry grins at him, before looking over at Bill's reaction. He's impressed, too, damn it, and he gives a thumbs up that Henry rolls his eyes at but is ultimately pleased by.

"I practice sometimes," he says. "I was always interested in hunting and stuff as a kid, so I wanted to be a good shot, but I never ended up getting a license." He shrugs, like all of his dreams are lost dreams and there's no point in being disappointed by it.

"Con-congrats," Bill says. "You succeeded. You're a g-great shot." Henry takes a mock bow - but then a gruff voice from behind them makes them all go stiff. Bill watches Vic and Belch's faces quickly blank. He wonders how many times they've watched Butch Bowers hurt Henry - how many times, and how badly.

"What the hell's going on here?"

Normally, the sound of Henry's dad's voice is a sign that it's time for him to go (and only too often, for Henry to go with him). Henry's shoulders draw up tight, and Bill sits there, frozen, watching Henry turn.

"... cleaning your gun, like you asked," Henry tells him, and Bill winces. Butch is in his face now, towering over Henry, which isn't helped by the fact that Henry is cowering, his head bowed.

“You’re cleaning my gun, huh,” Butch says, deceptively soft, and Henry swallows.

“Dad...”

Bill sees it coming before it even happens: Butch yells in his face, making Henry flinch, and then he takes the gun and begins to walk away. Bill hopes it’s the end of that - but then Butch turns around, firing the gun three times at the ground by Henry’s feet.

Henry’s reaction breaks Bill’s heart. He covers his face, his shoulders coming up to his ears, and Bill watches as his legs shake underneath him. He doesn’t run or even make a sound; he just trembles, eyes shut tight like he’s about to cry. Bill has this feeling in the pit of his stomach that Henry’s been shot at before, because Henry had started shaking before the gun had even gone off.

“Look at him now, boys,” Butch says, but Bill won’t look at him. He’s watching Henry. “Ain’t nothing like a little fear to make a paper man crumble.” There is a surge of real hatred bubbling up in Bill, but as Butch walks away he just scrambles to his feet to pull Henry over to sit down. As he gets closer, he sees the expression on Henry’s face - the increasing panic in his eyes, the same spark of mania that he’d had the night he’d tried to choke Bill to death.

It’s here, through Henry - It is trying to use him again. Henry looks like he’s three seconds away from going berserk.

Part of him wants to flinch away. The rest knows that if he doesn’t help pull Henry out of Its influence, Henry’s going to lose it and it won’t be pretty. He reaches out, a hand on each of Henry’s shoulders, and when Henry doesn’t react negatively except to zero in on Bill’s face, Bill directs him over to the side. He lets Bill manhandle him into sitting on his ass, leaning against Belch’s car. Henry’s not speaking, but he’s nearly hyperventilating; he’s freaking out almost as badly as he had that night in Bill’s room.

“D-deep breaths,” Bill tells him.

“Henry?” Vic calls hesitantly, soft. Henry flinches at the sound of his voice.

He's still got his face buried in his hands and Bill doesn't try to pull them away, but he wraps his arms around Henry and then hugs him tightly when he doesn't respond. "Vic," he says, muffled against Henry's shoulder. "Belch. C-come on."

Henry shakes, but he doesn't fight to get away when Vic hesitantly kneels at his side. "Are you okay?" he asks, but Henry really isn't up to answering and Bill knows it. He can't explain why he has this instinctual understanding of what's okay for Henry - it's the same feeling that leads him to comfort Bev when her dad's been particularly cruel, or Eddie, when his mom's getting manipulative. He doesn't know when the force that pulled the lucky seven together reached out to Henry, too, but it has. He just *knows*.

After a moment of hesitation, Vic mutters *fuck it* and wraps his arms around Henry's shoulders as well, overlapping Bill's. Belch comes over to sits by his feet with one of Henry's barn cats in his arms. He's semi-uncomfortable but not judging. Just... aware. After a minute, he reaches out and pats Henry's boot with the hand he'd been petting the cat with.

"I almost shat myself when he fired that gun off," Belch says, classless, but it startles a laugh out Henry, who looks up with wide, half-wild half-bewildered eyes. Belch shrugs. "Dude, I totally thought he was going to shoot you; that's scary as shit."

"Y-yeah," Bill agrees, trying to encourage the conversation without being too obvious about it. "If he had done that to me I would have p-passed out." On Henry's other side, Vic nods whole-heartedly. "You're probably the b-bravest guy I know, Henry." It comes out softer than he means for it to, but Henry just reaches up and wraps a hand around his forearm. He pulls back enough to look at Bill, his blue eyes almost pleading. Bill hates to see him hurting like this, and doesn't know how to make it better - but he tightens his grip on Henry's opposite shoulder and tries to look as reassuring as he can.

It's Belch and Vic who calm him down, really - seeing that they're not judging him helps a lot, and when Belch had admitted he'd been scared, a lot of tension had gone out of Henry's body. He's spent so long trying to pretend he's this invulnerable tough guy that he's forgotten that they give a shit about the person he is underneath all

of that.

“I hate to say this,” Vic starts, and then he snorts. “Actually, no, I don’t. I hate your dad, man. If my dad did that shit to me I would have run away a long time ago. I don’t know how you do it.”

“Does he do that a l-lot?” Bill asks when it’s clear Henry isn’t going to respond.

After a long silence, Henry speaks for the first time since his dad went inside. His voice is hoarse with the effort of holding back tears. “It’s not the first time, if that’s what you’re asking.” Then he clears his throat. “He shot me in the foot when I was little. Told the hospital I’d been playing with his gun. The gun doesn’t bother me by itself - he always has it on him, so I’m used to seeing it, but...”

“When he shot it at you it was like he was shooting you again,” Vic summarizes, and Henry nods. He looks a little uncertain still, like he’s waiting for Vic or Belch to call him a pussy, but neither of them do. “I literally would have pissed myself, okay. I wouldn’t have been able to touch the damn thing, let alone shoot bottles with it.” Vic gives him a crooked, hesitant smile. “You’re a badass, bro.”

That’s not how Bill would have phrased it, but it’s what makes Henry grin a little, though he’s still pale. “Don’t you forget it,” he says, and Vic snorts. By Henry’s feet, Belch chuckles a little. “Fuck, we gotta get out of here. I can’t stay here another fuckin’ second.” Henry rubs his eyes furiously and pulls away from their arms, standing up. “We should go to the park or something. What do you say, stutters?”

Bill looks at him appraisingly for a second. “I c-concur, capt’n.” Henry grins. He still looks a little fragile, but it’s not in the same way he’d been fragile a few minutes ago. This is just embarrassment.

Henry holds his hand out, and Bill feels suspiciously warm when he takes it. Henry heaves him up, but doesn’t let go right away. Neither of his other friends notice it, but Bill’s so aware - aware the way he used to be whenever Bev touched him. He’d be startled by it, uncomfortable, but it just slots itself into place the way his friendship with the other losers’ club kids did. It feels natural and *necessary*.

“Can we stop by and get B-Beverly, too?” Bill asks. “Maybe she’ll come hang out today.”

Henry knows all about the distance between him and his other friends, so Bill doesn’t feel the need to explain. Vic and Belch know, too, though they haven’t been on the receiving end of Bill’s stumbling rants about how shitty it is that they’ve all abandoned him (and *Georgie*), but they still know enough not to protest when Henry nods. Belch lets the cat down and wipes his hands on his jeans.

Henry doesn’t look back when they walk away, and Butch doesn’t call out for him - this time, when he leaves, he’s not running. They’re by his side, and Bill can’t help but think that’s making all the difference for Henry, who’s quickly regaining his confident stride. It’s like his house is a void that keeps him docile and hurt, but the second he leaves he regains *himself*.

By the time they reach Bev’s house, Henry’s back to walking around like he owns the town, and it’s Bill who’s trying to keep up. This changes when they all wander up to Bev’s front door.

It’s standing open.

“Bev?” he calls, and silence answers him.

“Why does all this shit gotta happen to *us*?” Belch groans from behind them, but Henry’s back on the defensive, his shoulders up and his eyes shrewdly examining the dimly lit rooms in front of them.

“Shut the fuck up, Belch,” Henry snaps, and Belch makes a face at him but goes quiet.

“Beverly?” Bill calls again, voice cracking, and Henry follows him inside, closely behind him. Henry’s got a protective streak, he’s noticed - he seems to be of the mindset that because he and his gang are older, they have to protect everyone else. It’s a stark turn from the way they’d had to run from Henry just a few months ago for fear of being beaten to a pulp, but it’s not a change Bill’s going to complain about.

“Beverly!” Henry yells, his voice low and angry-sounding, but his

eyebrows are furrowed into worry. “Fuck, fuck, *fuck*,” he adds, muttering, as he tails Bill.

They stop in the doorway to the bathroom. “That... oh, fuck,” Henry says weakly. “Shit.” He lightly pushes Bill to the side and kneels down next to the prone form of Beverly’s father. He presses two shaky fingers to the man’s throat, right underneath his jaw. He concentrates for a moment, grimacing, and then quickly pulls away. “He’s alive,” he assures Bill, who breathes out in relief. “Where’s she-loser, though?”

Bill doesn’t know. “I’ll ch-check her room,” he tells Henry, who nods, and he backtracks to the hall.

The door is open, but it’s not until he steps closer that he realizes with a sick pit of dread in his stomach what the red on the walls spell out.

“*Henry*,” he shrieks, stepping back. His heart is in his throat, but then Henry is suddenly there, staring into the room and swallowing.

They stand there, standing and barely breathing for a long time.

“We’ve got to g-get the others,” Bill says and Henry doesn’t speak, but he nods, and pulls Bill back toward the door.

“Where do we start?” Henry asks when they cross the threshold.

“The arcade,” he says immediately. “Richie’s always at the a-arcade. Then we can c-call everyone else.”

“What’s going on?” Belch asks, alarmed, and Henry grimaces.

“B-Beverly’s gone,” Bill answers instead. It comes out weaker than he wants it to, but he can’t stop the panic welling in his body that’s choking him. “Her dad’s unconscious and she’s just g-g-gone.”

“Her bedroom walls have *you’ll die if you try* written on them in blood,” Henry says lowly. “It’s that fucking clown again and we’re gonna get the others and kill It, okay? Any complaints?”

Belch looks like he’s gonna cry at the mere thought. Vic is pale, but

when he speaks, his voice is strangely firm. “We can’t leave her with It. She’s probably still alive, otherwise It wouldn’t have bothered leaving the message on the walls, right? We’ve got to save her.”

They all look at each other nervously, but they all know he’s right.

In the end, it takes very little effort to collect everyone. Of the eight others, only Richie gives him any trouble, and even *that* ends quickly enough once he tells Richie what he’d found in Bev’s apartment (namely, not Bev). They’re tense and uncomfortable as they walk down to the basement underneath Neibolt house, but no one is running or asking to keep watch. Even Stan, who doesn’t want to go - who hadn’t wanted to go in the first place and needs convincing to get over the threshold - is quiet and subdued as they make their way to the well.

“How are we supposed to get down there?” Mike asks, grimacing down into the darkness of the well. They all have flashlights, but no one wanted to be limited to a flashlight if they could help it, and especially not when they’re planning to fight a monstrous sewer monster. Mike takes a second to look around and then nods to a bunch of rope to Belch’s right. There’s a convenient pulley system above the well, and Vic - the tallest of the three older boys - volunteers to balance on the edges of the well to hook it up. It only takes a minute, and they sigh in relief when he hops down again unscathed.

“The house feels different,” Stan mutters, looking around as they all get ready to go down. There’s a hole several feet down that they figure will lead into the sewers, where It’s hiding Beverly; the current plan is to go through it.

“That’s ‘cause the clown bastard is somewhere down *there*,” Henry said with a grimace and a nod down into the well’s blackness. “It’s not in the house fucking with us this time.”

They all agree that’s the most likely solution, and then one by one they all start climbing down.

Belch goes first - to make sure he'll fit through the hole, which he does - and then Vic, just to make sure two of the oldest kids are there for when the others crawl through. Ben goes next, then Richie, then Eddie - who lets Richie bear most of his weight to get him off the rope and into the hole. Stan follows Eddie, and once he's in Bill goes with Ben right behind him. After Ben is safely in the hole, Bill peers up at Mike, who's frowning down into the well.

Henry's right behind Mike, watching their backs, and Bill watches as Mike hoists his nail gun ammo onto his shoulder, grabbing the gun with his left hand. His gets a knee onto the stone.

"Careful," Bill hears Henry say guardedly, but like it's a jinx, that's when Mike's hold on the side of the well slips. The gun falls outside the well, thankfully, but Mike teeters, trying to get his balance.

"*Fuck*," Mike spits, terrified, and Bill scrambles to lean out of the hole. He doesn't know what his plan is - to grab Mike, maybe, before he can fall all the way down, but he's sure he's shaking so badly he wouldn't even be able to hold on. Mike's scrambling for the edge of the well - a second from losing his balance and falling - but then Henry's scrambling behind him, one hand shooting out to grab Mike's arm, and the other fisted in the back of his shirt, making it pull tight around Mike's stomach and chest.

"Mike!" Eddie shrieks, but at the last minute Henry yanks Mike back.

"Be careful," Henry's hissing, his voice barely reaching Bill. "Jesus, Hanlon - you could have died!"

There's a moment of Mike's heavy breathing, and then, "Thanks, Henry. Shit. I thought I was dead."

Bill takes half a second to acknowledge in surprise that Mike just called him *Henry*.

Then, in the other half of the second, Eddie realizes Stan is missing.

"How the fuck?" Belch says, alarmed. He looks around frantically. "It was like he was there one second and was gone the next!"

"I swear to god, we would have noticed," Vic stresses, his eyes huge.

“We didn’t just let him wander off.”

They believe him, but it doesn’t change the fact that *Stan’s gone*. They all crawl through the hole and into the sewer proper, looking around for anything that could tell them where he went.

Mike and Henry rush down after them, but Bill’s only half listening to make sure nothing happens. He’s entirely focused on Stan now - Stan, who’s suddenly gone, who hadn’t wanted to come in the *first place*.

They all call his name, but there’s no response. For several long minutes as they rush through the sewers, Bill wonders if he’s done it for real this time, if he’s gotten another friend killed - and then they hear him scream. It’s not a reassuring sound, but Bill chases off after it anyway.

Stan’s shaking, laying on his back on the ground with some *thing* over him with its teeth-lined jaw covering the entirety of Stan’s face. It’s the most terrifying monster he’s ever seen, and Bill realizes that he knows what it is - it’s the face of the grotesque woman from the portrait in Stan’s dad’s office at the Temple.

It retreats when they shine their flashlights on it, but not before it shifts back into the form of Pennywise, grinning at them with a bloodstained mouth. It seems, for a long moment, to settle Its gaze on Bill.

He locks eyes with it the same way he had when It had been hiding behind Henry’s eyes.

He almost yells the same thing - *I’m not afraid of you* - but then It’s gone, and Bill’s focus shifts to Stan.

Bill has a horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach that Stan will never forget this - he’ll never forgive them, and he’ll never forget. Bill can’t even imagine what kind of horrors he must have seen down Its throat. Even Belch is stumbling over himself to try and comfort Stan, who keeps saying over and over again that they left him.

“We didn’t!” Vic insists, out of his depth and terrified, his brown eyes shiny with tears. To Stan’s left, right next to Eddie, Belch has a hand

on his shoulder and is trying to shush him. Bill kneels in front of his friends, sick to his stomach, and listens to the others desperately try to convince Stan they didn't leave him.

"We love you," Ben says at one point, and Bill nearly cries, because *he does*. He loves them all so much, and Stan's fear makes him feel like he's failed Stan in some way.

Maybe this was a mistake, he thinks, trying to blink back tears. Then he remembers Beverly, and as if It's listening to his thoughts, he sees his brother off to the right.

He turns his head to face Georgie's yellow rainslicker. He can't see his brother's face - not properly - but it's enough for him to remember why he's down here.

He doesn't say anything to the others; he just stands, and rushes off toward the sewer Georgie'd disappeared down. Behind him, he hears Henry curse, but he doesn't spare a thought for getting lost in the sewers without them knowing where he is. He doesn't care. Instead, he chases his brother as he runs deeper into the sewer system.

Eventually, the tunnels empty into a large cistern. Light streams down in a way that should make the room less gloomy - and for a second he does want to admire it. The second doesn't last, though, because it's hard to forget where they are. This is Its lair, and every inch of the place reminds him of it. It smells like something rotten - something dark and earthy and still somehow inhuman, a rot that's hung on for a million years. It's damp, and still too dark in spite of the streaming light. When he looks up, he realizes with a lurch of his stomach that the reason the light is seeming to flicker with some continuous movement is that there are bodies floating around the tip of the tower of children's junk.

All of the missing kids, Bill realizes, and when his gaze goes downward, he sees one more missing kid.

Beverly hangs limply in the air, her eyes fixed upward and glazed an unnatural white. Bill can't stop himself from screaming her name.

"Beverly!" He makes a leap for her shoes, but while she isn't all the

way up with the other kids, she's still high enough that he can't reach her. Determined - and having nearly forgotten about his brother - he goes over to the tower and starts pulling a box from the junk to stand on and pull her down.

Georgie appears for a split second when he looks up and rushes off behind the tower. He feels like he's being torn in two, but after a moment of consideration and terrible guilt, he looks up at Beverly.

"I'll come back for you, Bev," he says, and then he follows Georgie.

He can hear the vague sounds of the others as they follow him into the cistern - Henry and Eddie are both screaming his name. Henry sounds almost angry, but he doesn't care. He cares only about Georgie, who's standing in front of him with one arm and a grimy face. His paper boat is clutched in his only remaining hand.

After a minute, he hears the others – *and Beverly, thank god* – come up behind him. He can't take his eyes off of his brother to look at them.

"Georgie?" His voice cracks.

"What took you so long?" Georgie sounds so whiny - it's a welcome, familiar whininess. Bill feels his heart thudding in his chest.

The guilt is eating at him, but he can only choke out, "I was looking for you this whole time." It's true, he has been - he's here, now, looking at this boy and thinking *I'm still looking for you*.

"I couldn't find my way out of here." Bill swallows at the way Georgie's huge eyes look up at him, so lost and hurt. "It said I could have my boat back, Billie."

"Was she fast?" Maybe it's stupid to ask, but it's a question Bill's been waiting to ask him for almost a year now.

"I couldn't keep up with it." Georgie sounds so plaintive, but his expression doesn't change at all.

"She, Georgie. You call boats she." It feels like an echo to say. Another Bill, someone he isn't anymore, speaking out of his mouth.

“Take me home, Billie.” It sounds almost like a demand, and Bill tenses, but then Georgie’s face screws up and his eyes shine with tears the way Bill’s are. “I wanna go home. I miss you - I wanna be with Mom and Dad.”

“I want more than anything for you to be home,” he says, and his voice sounds so tight and wet. He’s trying so hard not to lose it. “With Mom... and Dad... I miss you so much.” He steps a little closer, and Bill does too.

Georgie blinks up at him, trusting, the way he used to always look at Bill. “I love you, Billie.”

“I love you, too.” His lower lip wobbles, but then Bill raises the nail gun he’d taken from Mike earlier and presses it against his brother’s forehead. He pretends his hand isn’t shaking, and tries not to sob aloud at the terrified, hurt sobs his brother begins to make. “But you’re not Georgie.” He pulls the trigger.

He will never forget the way Georgie just falls backward, lifeless and pale. For a long moment, he stands there, feeling the air disappear from his lungs and press in on him. He can’t *breathe*, he can’t - he can’t do anything except stand in horror and watch as the person he loves the most begins to shake violently. His limbs sprout out, his clothes turning into a familiar silver clown costume, and by the time that Pennywise stands in front of him, transformed out of his brother’s body, Bill is almost resigned to letting it kill him. He will never feel worse than he does now, he’s sure of it.

He raises the gun again anyway, aiming at the clown’s forehead. He can hear everyone behind him yelling at him to *kill it, kill it, Bill!* and when he pulls the trigger he’s almost convinced himself he’s going to kill it with one shot.

He pulls the trigger, and Pennywise’s forehead turns black and smoke-like, as if hit with an invisible projectile. But the clown comes at him anyway, undeterred, and after a brief scuffle he winds up on his back, the clown over him and Its teeth kept away from his face with only the nail gun clenched in Its jaw. Bill pushes on it, trying to force Its face further away, but before he makes any real headway he hears Beverly’s low voice growling, “Leave him alone!”

She goes to hit It, drawing Its attention away from Bill, and when It spins towards her he clammers to his feet. It takes half a minute to assess the situation, and then he leaps onto Its back, shoving a long bar into Its mouth and holding It back, clinging to his neck. They join him, holding onto Its arms and in Richie's case, joining Bill on Its back, their arms wrapped around Its neck. In front of It, Belch and Henry are punching It in the face - it doesn't seem to do much damage and only gets them headbutted and shoved aside for their trouble.

It manages to throw them all - all except Bill, who trembles in Its grasp as he's drawn up tight against Its body. The hand around his throat hurts, but he can't pull it away even though he's yanking with all his strength.

"Let him go," Beverly chokes. They're all standing there in a group, facing the clown and Bill.

The clown shakes Its head so violently Bill shakes too in Its grasp. "No, I'll take him." The monster's voice turns mocking. "I'll take *all of you*. I'll feast on your flesh as I feed on your fear." It sounds like a line in a bad horror film, but Bill's afraid anyway. He's so scared and he doesn't know what to do - because there's nothing he *can* do.

It pauses.

"*Or...*" Its voice turns mocking, childish and *horrible*. "You just leave us be. I'll take him, only him, and then I will have my long rest, and you will all live to grow and thrive and lead *happy lives*... until old age takes you back to the *weeds*." It devolves into a growl, into the sick sounds of an insane and alien monster wheezing at the thought of a new meal.

Henry objects immediately. "What the *fuck*? No, *fuck*, no. We're not leaving him, you kid-eating *fuck*. *No*." Next to him, Beverly frantically nods her head. "Let him go, you bastard!" He raises one of the iron posts as if he's about to hurl it at the clown, but then his eyes dart down to Bill's face and he seems to realize that he stands a good chance of hurting Bill if he does.

"Leave," Bill manages to say, and Beverly's eyes go huge and round.

Beside her, Henry's shaking his head vehemently, the iron post trembling visibly in his fist. His knuckles are white. "I'm the one who dragged you all into this." Bill's voice breaks, and he feels tears well up in his eyes again. "I'm s-s-s-so s-sorry."

"S-s-sorry," It chuckles, echoing. Its shaking him a little, reminding him of exactly where he is.

"Go!" he says, louder. He tries to be as authoritarian as possible, to make them listen to him, but they only falter there, staring at his face as he pleads with them to leave him behind.

"Guys, we can't." Beverly looks around, but none of the others will look at her.

"C'mon, you little shits," Henry snaps, backing her up. He sounds *panicked*, truly scared, in a way that Bill's not sure he's ever heard before. "We can't leave him!"

"Sorry," Bill says, choking around Pennywise's fist. It tightens around his throat and jaw in response.

"I told you, Bill," Richie says in a low voice, climbing to his feet. Everyone's attention is drawn to him. "I fucking told you. It's your fault." Bill squeezes his eyes shut, trying to ignore the way tears are rushing down his cheeks. He can't hold them in. "You punched me in the face, made me walkthrough shitty water - you brought me to a fucking *crackhead house*."

It's all true, and Bill knows that this is it - they're going to leave him. He feels his chest tighten in panic again, but he refuses to ask them to stay. He won't ask that of them. "And now?" Richie continues, drawing him out of his thoughts as he yanks a baseball bat out of the tower of lost things. "I'm going to have to kill this fucking clown."

His eyes pop open just in time for Pennywise to throw him to the ground. He chokes on air, crawling away, and he hears Richie scream, "Welcome to the losers' club, asshole!"

Richie swings the bat at the clown with enough force that it would have knocked a human out easily - Bill's actually impressed. In the

resulting scuffle, Henry trips over to his side, helping him to his feet and they watch for a moment as the others attack. Mike, with a rusty post that gets caught by thousands of blackened, burnt hands - then Stan, who saves him by swinging another iron rod through the arms erupting from Its mouth.

One by one they all take their turns, until the clown starts shifting - Stan's painting-woman, giant preying mantis arms that nearly stab Mike through the gut, a mummy... even Eddie's leper, which vomits over his face and chest. They all fight back, with whatever weapons they have on hand and with fists and feet, and after enough blows It spins until it faces Henry, Its face shifting again.

Bill looks from It to Henry and back again, but the glance away is just enough time that he'd missed the change. When he looks back at the monster, It's wearing Patrick Hockstetter's face. "Hey, Henry," It says, a perfect facsimile of the dead bully's drawl. "Want me to put it in my -"

Henry lets out a sound so angry and desperate that Bill's half-convinced It's driven him mad in less than a minute. Hockstetter grins widely - triumphant and crazy - but then Its face shifts one more time, until Butch Bowers is grinning down at Henry with bloodlust in his eyes.

"You pansy-ass piece of shit," Butch tells him, taunting (and nothing at all like the drunken cursing of the real Butch).

Bill's never been prouder of Henry than he is when Henry yells "*Fuck you!*" into his father's face and swings the iron post in his hands at Its head.

The post makes contact, knocking It down. It sits there on Its knees with a dazed expression for a moment, a split second, before it looks up at Beverly.

It changes again, to one last form. Beverly's dad. "Hey, Bevie," It says, something sickeningly sweet and disgusting in Its tone. "Are you still my little -"

Bill watches in awe as she shrieks and thrusts a rod down her fake-

father's throat with more hatred in her expression than he's ever seen.

It spits out the rod and scrambles backwards. They follow slowly, threateningly, as it gasps and wheezes.

"That's why you didn't kill Beverly," Bill tells It, sure now. "Cause sh-sh-sh-she wasn't afraid. And we aren't either. Not anymore." He steps forward. "Now you're the one that's afraid, because you're going to *starve*." It thrusts Itself backward into a drain as if his words are a physical blow. He figures, for a creature that feeds on emotion and intent, they might as well be.

"He thrusts his fists against the post and still insists he sees the ghosts," It mutters, a half-whisper. One last shot at making him tremble. Wordlessly, Stan hands him a rod. *"He thrusts his fists against the p-p-p-posts..."*

Bill raises the rod and It sinks deeper into the drain.

"Fear?" It whispers, and falls into darkness.

They stare after It for a long moment. "I know what I'm doing for my summer experience essay," Richie says, half disbelieving.

Bill puts an arm around Beverly's shoulder and she throws her arms around his neck. He hugs her tight. After a long minute, Henry puts his arms around them both and pulls them all tighter together. Bill shifts until he's got an arm around Henry's back, too, and buries his face into Henry's shoulder. The smell of millennia-old rot fades, until all that's left is human decay.

"Guys," Ben says, distracting them. His voice is weak. "The kids are floating down."

The rest of them stare, but Bill's attention is caught by a flash of yellow. He slowly walks over, pulling away from Henry and Beverly, and something in him breaks when he takes Georgie's raincoat into his hands.

There are no words for how he feels, and he doesn't try to use any. Instead, he sobs and presses his face into the coat his brother had

worn to his death. His brother, who is dead now and who isn't coming back. The rest of them - Richie first, then Mike and Henry and everyone else - come and hold him. He presses his body against theirs and tries to let them hold him together.

When he calms down, Henry takes charge. He does so gently, not even trying to pry the raincoat from his hands - he only forces Bill to stand. "Come on," he murmurs. "We should go through the sewers, where they lead out into the Barrens. Richie and Stan both got knocked around pretty badly; I don't think either of them should be climbing up that rope out the well - not to mention Lover over there with his broken arm." Eddie raises it as a silent agreement.

"Yeah," he chokes. "Okay."

Henry and Mike flank him as they head out toward the sewer tunnels that will hopefully lead them outside. They're relying on instinct, but it's good instinct - the kind of instinct that's kept them alive in spite of everything.

On the way out of the cistern, they pass Patrick Hockstetter's body, coming to rest in a pool of dirty water. Henry looks at it, pausing for a long moment. A single tear slips down his cheek, and then he wipes it away roughly and speeds up to join Bill and Mike again.

Once they find their way outside, they disperse a little. Everyone but him, Henry, and Beverly go out into the fresh air and step into the creek, where semi-clean water rushes over their feet.

Bill watches from the sidelines, still clutching Georgie's raincoat and unsure of how to handle *anything*, as Beverly hesitantly walks up to Henry. He's been watching everyone with his arms crossed and his back pressed against the tunnel wall.

She stops a foot or so away and then leans against the wall next to him. "It... It turned into your dad," she says, quietly.

He clears his throat, then swallows. "Yeah. Turned into yours, too."

"Yeah."

They're silent for several minutes. Nobody interrupts them - namely because Richie is trying to help clean Eddie up in the water from the stream, Stan is sitting outside with his eyes closed, face tilted up toward the sky, and Mike is sitting right next to him with a hand gently rubbing his back. A few feet away, Belch, Vic, and Ben try to clean up a little, too, to avoid startling their parents. Bill doesn't think he can even speak, let alone *do* anything.

"I'm sorry I said those things, that day by the Kenduskeag," Henry says eventually, and the way he says it makes it sound like it's one of many apologies he has to make. He's not looking at her, but she's looking at *him* with those huge eyes Bill used to think he was half-in-love with. He's not so sure anymore, because he's much more interested at the way Henry's eyes water a little, staring off into the distance.

"That's okay," Beverly says, and then she pats him on the shoulder and goes outside to sit by Mike and Stan. They watch Eddie cling to Richie, who's shirtless and using his wet shirt to wipe gunk off his face and out of his hair. Richie's being surprisingly tender - or rather, it would be surprising, if it were anyone but Eddie. Underneath the sarcasm and bantering, they've always been a little soft for each other.

After a while, when the others are starting to disperse, Henry comes over and puts an arm around Bill's shoulders. "C'mon." He stands straight, obligingly, and lets Henry lead him out. "Let's go."

"You c-coming to mine tonight?" he asks quietly.

He thinks Henry might know that he's not really up to company, because he shakes his head. "Nah. I'm gonna go to Vic's." Bill's glad he is, actually, because it means good things - it means that Henry's learning to rely on Vic and Belch, too, and that's something Bill's been angling for since the beginning. It still makes him smile a little when Henry adds, "I'm gonna come to yours tomorrow, though, okay?"

He nods, and Henry walks him home.

“I can only remember parts,” Beverly’s telling them a few days of recuperation later. The summer is almost over. “But I thought I was dead. That’s what it felt like.” On her other side, Henry’s quietly nodding along. Vic is sandwiched between Henry and Ben, and Belch is sitting next to Mike, between him and Eddie. The Bowers gang is spread out, less a gang and more a part of the losers’ club. “I saw us, all of us. Together, back in the cistern, but we were older, like our parent’s ages.” She looks around at them, at a loss as to what to say.

“W-w-what were we all doing there?” Bill asks. He’s not sure he really wants to know, which is good, because Beverly doesn’t have an answer.

“I just remember how we felt,” she replies, sighing. “How scared we were... I don’t think I can ever forget that.” It’s not reassuring.

They’re all silent for a long time, but eventually Bill spies a piece of glass in the dirt at their feet and he *knows*. It’s one of those instincts, telling him that they need to do this.

He picks the shard of glass up, cleaning it off as best he can with his shirt and thumbs, and stands. “Swear it,” he says. “S-swear... if It isn’t dead, if It ever comes back, we’ll come back, too.” He doesn’t want to swear it himself, but he knows they *must*.

Bev stands first, instant agreement, and then Richie does, too. Eddie stands with him, and then Vic and Mike stand. Henry, Belch, Stan, and Ben all join them together, looking at each other with unhappy expressions but no arguments.

Bill digs the shard of glass into his own palm, and then once he’s bleeding freely he starts going around the circle. Richie first, then Eddie, then Belch - so on and so forth. When he reaches Henry, he lingers a little too long, his palm cupping the back of Henry’s hand. When he digs the glass shard into Henry’s palm, their eyes meet. It feels too intimate, perhaps, which is why Bill looks away and finally cuts Beverly’s palm as well.

They all take hands, slowly, and then stand there clutching tightly to one another until the impulse to hang on to each other dies.

“I gotta go,” Stan says when the time has come to break away. Then, he adds, “I hate you.” They stare at each other, blank faced, for a long moment, until they all break. Stan grins at Richie and Eddie, and then suddenly they’re all snickering. “I’ll see you later,” Stan tells them, and he retreats.

They say their goodbyes to Stan, and then to Eddie. After that, everyone drifts away until Henry’s saying goodbye to Vic and it’s just him, Bill, and Beverly.

They make small talk about Beverly’s plans, and Bill wants to be sad that she’s leaving but he’s honestly too relieved. This is good for her... and deep down, he knows they weren’t ever going to be anything, anyway. It wouldn’t have been before Henry and it’s certainly not now that Henry is the fixture in Bill’s life that he is.

“I never felt like a loser when I was with all of you,” she tells him, and he wants to say *I feel the same way*. He doesn’t, and when she walks away he lets her go.

He and Henry stay, overlooking the Barrens together quietly. It’s companionable, but Bill feels like something’s left unsaid between them. He just doesn’t know what it is he needs to say.

“The air feels different,” Henry comments, and it does. “Lighter, somehow.”

He nods, but doesn’t speak.

“You know,” Henry continues, softer. “You stopped It. You made us confront It, and now It won’t hurt anyone else. That’s all because of you. Hell, I’d probably be dead or crazy right now if you hadn’t. So... thanks.”

Bill looked up at him properly, meeting his clear blue eyes. Henry looks more peaceful than Bill thought he could be. His shoulders are relaxed and there’s a little smile on his lips. “Finally admitting I’m the b-boss, Bowers?” he teases after a beat of not knowing what else to say, and Henry rolls his eyes, the serious tone breaking. He nudges Bill’s shoulder with his own.

“As if,” Henry says. “I could kick your ass any day.”

“But you won’t.” It comes out too warm, maybe, but Henry just ducks his head and smiles when he says it. Henry gets up to go, but Bill scrambles to his feet and stops him. “Will we still be f-f-f-friends when school starts?” Bill asks. “Or will you pretend all this never happened?”

Henry looks at him like he’s mildly stupid. “Denbrough...” He cuts himself off and shakes his head, exasperated. “Will we still be f-f-f-friends,” he mutters, mocking, and then he glares over at Bill. “God, I hate you sometimes.” And then he leans over and presses his mouth against Bill’s.

It lasts maybe half a second, but when he pulls away his expression isn’t regretful, just a little hesitant. His cheeks are pink, and that’s what makes Bill lean in and kiss him again, reaching up with his still-bloody hand to cup the junction of Henry’s neck and jaw.

When they break away, Bill’s mouth is tingling ever so slightly. It’s a good feeling.

“I’ll see you around, loser,” Henry says, still soft, with a half smile.

Bill smiles at him, the biggest he’s managed since the sewers. “See you, loser.”

Even after Henry leaves, Bill keeps that smile on his face. For the first time in months, he feels safe.

Author's Note:

I want to clarify something real quick: this fic is meant to only span the course of the first film. This means that some things - like Henry's racism and unaddressed internalized homophobia - do not fully get discussed and resolved here. There's not time. However, this was meant to be a starting point, with the implication that Henry's realizing his behaviors aren't okay. You can't just fix someone like Henry over the course of three months and I'm not trying to

say you can. In this universe Henry has a lot of shit to work on and you best believe he's going to.